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THE LOST BRIDE.

VOL. I.

THE LOST BRIDE.

BY

GEORGIANA LADY CHATTERTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE LOST BRIDE.

CHAPTER I.

MY ITALIAN CHILDHOOD.

AQUIRE of foolscap paper is placed before me, and I am asked to relate the principal events of an apparently eventful life.

It now strikes me for the first time how little influence even the most marked of these events had on my character. Such, for instance, as the misery of sudden poverty, the loss or gain of riches, produced but little

effect or impression on my life. It was the friend and enemy, the influence of congenial companionship, or the reverse, which caused the development of my self—that selfish self which has now grown old in years, but not in feelings, for my enjoyments in this beautiful world are often keener than when I was a thoughtless and apparently gay and admired girl of sixteen.

But I should throw away this said quire of foolscap with a shudder at the fool's-cap-fittingness of the undertaking, and leave its clean pages for some more useful object, if the history of my life were not interwoven with those I have loved better than myself, and for whose history and sufferings and joys I would gladly win the sympathy of a larger circle of friends. For friends are to be found

among readers, friends who sympathize with the better portions of our nature—who can look on us with admiration and love—can love even personally unknown friends better than themselves. “Better than ourselves!” These words contain the very pith of Plato’s teachings and Socrates’ wise sayings. This was ante-Revelation religion, and I only wish that modern so-called philosophers, who foster the fatal self-sufficing religion of the day, would “show us something as good.”

My early youth was passed in Southern Italy, my mother’s home; and although my father was English and a Protestant, I was brought up in my mother’s faith, such as it was, for she happened to have lived among bad exponents of the religion. My father possessed few of the characteristics of Pro-

testantism, and his tolerance and charity were so great that instinctively I clung more to his religion than I did to my mother's,—or, rather, I did so after his death, which happened at the most critical period of a young Italian's girlhood—my fourteenth year.

It was my first grief, and to my wild, ill-regulated, and irreligious nature, it became despair. For a few weeks after I was carried forcibly from his grave, I shut myself up in selfish woe, neglecting the duty of endeavouring to comfort my mother—or, rather, I did not fully believe in her sufferings, for I fancied she had never been able to appreciate his noble nature. For she was one of those indolent and uneducated Italians whose chief occupation in life seems to be the en-

joyment of a *dolce far niente*, and of their own loveliness and perfect health. From the torpid stupor of despair I was at last roused by the unexpected arrival of a distant relation of my mother's—the young Marchese Carlo Spinola. His father lived near our home at Sorrento, and from the time he first helped my baby feet to climb the orange trees, till he went to college, when I was twelve years old, I hero-worshipped him, and the dream and ambition of my childhood was to be his wife.

Of late the news which reached my father's ears of Carlo's career at college made him look grave, and I sometimes feared that he disapproved of the kind of childish and half joking engagement there was between us ; but neither my mother nor I would be-

lieve that the handsome boy could do wrong. I afterwards learnt, many years afterwards, that his sudden return home, after two years' absence, was caused by expulsion from the college for some grave offence.

I had never left my room since the day of my father's funeral, and sullenly refused to accompany my mother in her solitary meals in the great state dining-room, or even in her walks by the beautiful sea-shore, in which I formerly delighted. Her old nurse Pepita attended upon me with a persevering assiduity and patience, which I sometimes half-ungratefully resented. One day I heard her running up the stairs with unusual alacrity, and bursting open the door, she called out, with a shrill glee, "*Il Signor Carlo è qui, e t'aspetta nel salone!*" With a cry of

joy, for which I afterwards felt ashamed, I rushed down stairs, not even casting one look in the large mirror, or attempting to arrange my flowing hair and negligent attire.

He was alone in the saloon, for it was the hour of my mother's *siesta*, and I was about to rush up to him with the impetuous glee of former childish times, when a glance at the alteration which two years had made suddenly arrested my steps. He was certainly handsomer than ever, and yet there was an indefinite something I did not like, and I half shrank from the fiery expression of his dark flashing eyes, as I strove to disengage myself from the embrace which already had frightened me by more than its former impetuous warmth.

"You no longer love me, I see; you are not

even glad I'm come," he said, as he held my head between his hands and looked into my eyes. "And you are more lovely than ever," he continued, as he stroked my hair. And then I first became aware of my neglected attire, and felt grateful to him for his affection.

From that day I recovered all my former high spirits, and the next three months were the most wildly happy time of my early youth; for I was only fourteen, and still quite a child in mind, and very backward in learning and accomplishments.

At the end of that delightful Summer my guardian, Mr. Mordaunt, a distant relative of my father's, arrived from England, and the misery of my education began. He was horrified to discover how little I knew, and

shocked at the idle life I led with my cousin Carlo. There was an end of all our delightful rides and boating excursions along the beautiful shores; and Mr. Mordaunt seemed to have taken a most unaccountable aversion to my cousin.

He tried to persuade my mother to bring me to England, and place me at some good school in London. She could not bear the idea of leaving Italy, but consented to place me in a convent at Naples. But he shook his head, and at last, after many grave consultations, it was agreed that he should take me to Paris, and place me in a convent there.

I did not like my guardian at all, and could not help feeling much annoyed with my dear father for having thus given me up

to such a tyrannical and hard-hearted man. I discovered afterwards that it was Mr. Mor-daunt's father to whom my guardianship had been left, but he died quite suddenly in Ireland, a few days before my father, and his son inherited what he seemed to think a very troublesome office.

He was not rich either, and he complained bitterly of the expensive journey he had deemed it his duty to take. Yet he was not unkind in his manner to me; he rather bored me with the reverse, and I sometimes fancied that he loved me, and was therefore jealous of my evident affection for Carlo. The latter was of course furious at the prospect of my being taken away, and he extorted from me a promise that we were to keep up a secret correspondence, and that no

power on earth should prevent our marriage as soon as he became of age. This would be in two years, and in the meantime he said he should come to see me in Paris. So we parted full of hope, and I started with my guardian and Pepita, leaving my mother crying at the doorsteps, having showed more feeling at parting from me than I had believed she possessed; and I began to love her better than I had ever done before.

CHAPTER II.

MY ENGLISH HOME.

OF the two years I passed in the convent at Paris I shall say but little—for although I made considerable progress in learning and music, no other event than an occasional letter from Carlo diversified the monotony of the hours and days. Yet I enjoyed the apparently dull life, and even the constraint, and was rather sorry when my guardian came to take me on a visit to some of my relations in England. I had seen him several times during the two years,

and was still less favourably impressed by his countenance and manner. There was a cat-like quietness in his walk, and stealthy expression in his downcast eyes, that provoked me. Carlo had once contrived to see me at the home of one of my schoolfellows by whose means the correspondence had been carried on. We renewed our vows of eternal love, and he was still the hero of my romantic dreams ; and if anyone had told me that in the course of years he or I should change, it would have aroused my utmost indignation.

I was to return to my mother at Sorrento after the visits to my English relations were ended, and then we resolved that our marriage should take place. I fancy that my guardian had discovered or suspected the clandest-

tine correspondence, for he took every opportunity of abusing Italians in general, and the Marchese, as he would persist in calling Carlo Spinola, in particular.

I could now speak English pretty well, for I had learnt quickly that and other languages;—thanks to the judicious teachings of the good nuns. My father's place, Langdale Priory, which I was to inherit when I became of age, had been let for many years to another of the Mordaunt family, and my first visit was to him at Langdale, this home of my ancestors.

There was a large picture of Langdale Priory at our Italian home, and also some good sketches made by my father, and he had often described to me the different rooms. The south drawing-room, that

looked on a broad terrace walk, and down a grassy slope to the lake below, in one of his sketches, was my favourite. I thought less of the north side, which, in the large oil-painting, was not so attractive, although that was evidently the principal or show side of the house, which had a fine portico in the Italian style that succeeded the Elizabethan in England.

But on the south and garden side the building was more irregular, and a fine old gable and window remained, which I heard had been part of a much older house. My father had pointed out the nurseries in this; and a little oriel window on a lower level, which he said had been his dear mother's boudoir, was my especial object of admiration.

It was fortunately a fine sunny evening when we drove through the park gates, and as I caught a first sight of Langdale Priory, the whole palatial front showed to great advantage against a background of fine trees which grew on the rising ground beyond the lake. It was exactly the point of view taken in the large picture, and I at once distinguished the library windows on the left side of the broad portico, and those of the dining-room on the right, and one of the windows of my father's bedroom over it at the western corner, looking towards the stables, which was also a fine building, in the same kind of Italian style, with a high clock-tower.

“Yes, it is a fine place,” said my guardian, in his slow, oily voice, when he heard my

exclamation of delight at the first sight of the place. "But how little prospect there seemed to be, when your father left England, that *you* would ever inherit the property!"

"How was that?" I inquired, much startled at the idea. "My father never gave me the slightest hint."

"Oh! I can quite understand that, for he never would believe in the possibility of his elder brother's marriage. I always suspected it, and that some fine day we should have a great deal of trouble. However, here we are at the door, and I will not mar the joy I see you feel at your arrival in your ancestral home, by any evil prognostications."

"Oh! but do tell me all there is to know, pray."

“Another time I will. See, here are actually Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt, and Miss Stanway, a tiresome old woman they call Aunt Jane, at the door, come to have a look at the young heiress.”

He always called me the “young heiress,” and there was something in the words and tone that grated on my ear particularly.

I liked the appearance of the Mordaunts, and was still more pleased with the somewhat odd-looking but genial countenance of Aunt Jane.

“You are no relation of mine,” said the latter, as she gave me a warm embrace, “but I like your face, and you must always call me Aunt Jane, remember.”

“That I will,” said I, as I kissed her on both cheeks, according to the French fashion

I had been accustomed to see among my companions at the convent.

As we had crossed over from Calais that morning, and travelled all the day, Mrs. Mordaunt said that I must be so tired and starved, that I was to go and lie down, and have some refreshment at once.

But Aunt Jane, who saw how eagerly I was looking round the large hall, and devouring with my eyes every picture, and the finely-carved chimney-pieces at each end, said,

“ Oh ! no, she is not tired ; and, besides, she could not possibly rest till she has seen the house and gardens. I know she is longing to be inside, and outside, and everywhere all at the same moment. Come, I will take charge of her, and show her the drawing-

rooms, and her grandmother's old south boudoir."

"Oh ! do, for I always longed to be inside that beautiful oriel window I saw in my dear father's sketch." And here the recollection of him, and the feeling that every part of this house was hallowed by his presence, that his eyes had rested on those very pictures of our ancestors, his dear footsteps and harmonious voice must have echoed through these halls from the time he could first crawl till he finally left the loved home to accompany a still more loved wife to Italy, aroused emotion almost beyond control.

My mother could not stand the English climate, and this had been the greatest trial of my father's life, owing to his peculiarly

deep attachment to his ancestral home. He had let it at a very low rent to the Mordaunts, in order to ensure some good inhabitants to enjoy themselves in it, and to take care of the village poor. When Aunt Jane took me out through the breakfast-room, along the south terrace, to the farther corner, from whence my father had taken his painting, my tears flowed so fast I could scarcely see.

“Now, sit down on this bench, and I will leave you alone to look round on all the objects your father loved so well. You will find me in the breakfast-room when you have wandered over the garden, where I am sure you will like to go quite by yourself.”

I seized her hand, but could not speak,

for a sudden pang of violent despairing sorrow for my father's loss seemed to paralyze my senses, and I could scarcely refrain from throwing myself on the ground, and crying out with agony. For I was wild and impetuous as ever, and had profited but little in disposition or judgment from the convent life. Although I was now what many people called learned and accomplished, my mind and temper were still as entirely uncultivated and untrained as when I selfishly shut myself up at my father's death, and would not be comforted.

The result of my solitary walk in the south garden was an increased feeling of adoration for my father's memory, and intense love for this place. I knelt down and kissed the old high massive stone sun-

dial, where he used to climb up as a child to see the hour. A thousand little stories of his boyhood and youth, long half forgotten, now returned ; and I heard the very tones of his voice as he had related them to me. A longing to know more about him was mingled with a wonder that I had hitherto been so strangely indifferent about it.

The sight of his old residence seemed to have developed suddenly a number of new interests and ardent attachments. I felt that I loved that old place better than anything in the world. And Carlo? A pang of almost remorse seized me as I thought of him at last. I seemed to dread being unfaithful to him, as it occurred to me that even his love would not reconcile me, as love for his

bride seemed to have done my father, to live away from this enchanting place.

“Then I suppose I love my father even better than Carlo? Can this be possible?” I thought. Strange that the first time I had ever really analysed my feelings, or ever put them into words, was during that first stroll through the Langdale Priory gardens. “But of course Carlo will like to live here,” I continued to reflect. “I shall be rich, too, and he values riches; and he will have even greater luxuries here—the fine English horses and carriages which I had heard so much praised both in Italy and Paris; and he has already spent more than his father can afford to give him,” I reflected, too. “Yes, he will certainly be happy here,” and I walked with a proud step to-

wards the house, with the foolish exultation of being able to confer all this on my betrothed.

At that moment I discerned my guardian's face in the oriel window, and the sneering and exultant smile on it reminded me most painfully of the mysterious words he had uttered. "How little I thought this property would ever be yours!" I fancy that he could read my exulting thoughts, and saw the buoyancy of my step and proud bearing.

A shudder came over me as I felt that he might, by some mysterious agency, have power to deprive me of all this. I had heard my father say, "Mordaunt is a good, clever man of business—a lawyer that could make people believe black was white. He

would be sure to manage her property well, and there may be difficulties.”

I now remembered his having one day said this to my mother, when he was first taken ill, and he told her he had appointed Mr. Mordaunt my guardian. She was to write to him at once if he got worse. I felt now quite sick with apprehension, and determined I would ask Aunt Jane about him, and why my father appointed his father my guardian—why it was necessary to have such a clever man to manage it—why it might be necessary to make people believe black was white. I now felt that if I were ever deprived of this dear place, with all its hallowed recollections, I should never be happy again—never could be happy anywhere else.

The idea of its possible loss intensified my adoration for it. And that horrible man evidently wanted me to love him. Could he really love me, or was it for my riches? If the latter, why did his evil eyes glisten with satisfaction when he said those mysterious words that cast a doubt upon my inheritance? Yes, he had rapturously enjoyed the horror and surprise which, I am sure, my countenance must have shown.

I ran into the breakfast-room, with the intention of asking Aunt Jane, and was much disappointed at not finding her alone.

“Well, my dear little girl,” she said, “you have lived a good deal during the last half hour. I really believe you have thought more in that time than all the rest of your little life.”

“How could you know that? Does my face show all I have been thinking and feeling?”

“Yes; you are several years older than you were yesterday. You have thought, and you have put your feelings into thoughts and words for almost the first time in your life; you have been very happy and very miserable, and now you are in a kind of mysterious doubt, which it annoys you to remain in.”

“You must be a perfect witch,” I said, “to discover all this, and I do so long——”

“You do so long for a good talk with me?” said the old aunt. “Well, you shall have it after dinner in my room, and I will tell you all I know, or rather suspect.”

As she repeated the last word my guard-

ian entered the room. I saw that he turned pale, and he said, with oily politeness,

“What is it Miss Stanway suspects?”

“A great deal, and perhaps you can help me to unravel it; but I have no time to relate it now, for we must all dress for dinner.”

CHAPTER III.

AUNT JANE.

ON looking back on my first impression of English people in contrast to those Italians with whom I had chiefly lived, I find that I was struck with the spirit of fun, or, rather, perhaps the appreciation of the ridiculous which the English possess. Perhaps I inherited this turn from some of my father's ancestors—certainly not from himself, for I never saw in him any signs of it. This dear old maid, called Aunt Jane at

Langdale Priory, first showed me this (to me) new sense. Though perfectly good-natured, she was always discovering the ridiculous side of everything and everybody, and she enchanted me by her observations.

Another attraction Aunt Jane possessed was her evident dislike to my guardian, and the kind manner in which she defended me from his advances. When I went to her room that first evening she told me a great deal about my family which I had never heard before. It must have been a sore subject to my father, who had been deeply attached to his eldest brother, and this was probably the reason that he never mentioned to me even that he had ever had one.

Henry Vivian, the eldest son of my grand-

father, and heir to a much larger property than that which I was soon to inherit, had been very wild in his youth. But he must have been not deficient in intellect or attraction, for he took a high degree at college, and was extremely popular in the exclusive and fastidious London Society of Almack's time. But a fatal passion for gambling, and repeated losses at play, obliged my grandfather to sell much of the fine old property, which had belonged to the family for many generations. When Aunt Jane told me this I suddenly remembered what my father said when showing me the view of Langdale Priory. "Yes, it's a grand old place, but almost too large for the property that remains."

At one time, after repeated losses, Aunt

Jane said that the family went abroad to economize, and the place was let, and the prodigal son was seized with such a fit of remorse at seeing the grief of his father and brother, that he suddenly disappeared, and for several months no one knew what had become of him. At last a letter arrived from New Zealand, where he said he was endeavouring to make a fortune, and replace some of the losses entailed by his extravagance. His father wrote to beg he would return home, but no answer came. As he was idolized by his family, in spite of all his faults, they were miserable at receiving no answer to various letters. At last my father determined to go there and seek his brother. His father objected strongly at first, as he dreaded the dangers of the voyage, and the search

in an unsettled country. Besides, my father was his favourite son, and having no other children, he feared that the old property, to which he was deeply attached, might be left without an inheritor of the time-honoured, ancient name.

However, the entreaties of my father at last prevailed, and he sailed for New Zealand. When he arrived at the place from which his brother's last letter was dated he neither found him, nor was there anyone who could inform him what had become of Henry Vivian. No person of that name had been in the town within the recollection of the postmaster ; and, to my father's dismay, he found the letters destined for him unclaimed. At the inn he found that a gentleman, answering the description of Mr. Vivian, had been

there six months before—a Mr. Smith—who had paid his bill, and they believed he had proceeded by the public conveyance on the road towards a neighbouring town. I will not detail here the various adventures my father had in his search, which Aunt Jane, and also Mr. Mordaunt, described to me.

After searching for six months in the island, my father obtained some information which led him to suppose his brother had sailed in a ship for Canada. There he went, and when travelling through Canada he chanced to meet his cousin, Mr. Mordaunt, my guardian, and they both searched for several months. They then agreed to separate, and Mr. Mordaunt went south, and my father in an opposite direction, having

formed a plan by which they could communicate in case of need.

Some time afterwards my father received a letter from Mr. Mordaunt, in which he announced that he had discovered the place where Mr. Vivian had died. A beautiful girl, who seemed to have been much attached to the handsome young Englishman, related how they had been for a little sail on the lake, and were overtaken in a storm. The boat was upset, and as Mr. Vivian endeavoured to save the poor girl's life by swimming on shore, he was struck by the keel of the boat and killed, but she was rescued by a fishing-boat which came up. The account of all the circumstances was attested by such evident grief on the part of the girl, that my father had no doubt as to the truth of

the story ; confirmed too by her possession of Henry Vivian's watch and other small articles which he had in his possession when he left England.

He had been buried at the nearest town under the name of Mr. Stuart, and she, poor girl, had no idea that it was not his own. He had engaged himself as a farm-labourer on the plantation, but though he seemed so poor, she was convinced he was a real gentleman, and was quite unfit for such hard work.

There seemed to my father no doubt that his poor brother had thus met with an untimely end, and he returned in deep grief to England, taking with him the watch and some papers which the girl gave up—in fact all the relics which could be found of my unfortunate uncle.

My grandfather never recovered the shock of his eldest son's death, and in less than a year afterwards he had a paralytic stroke, and soon afterwards died. My father of course succeeded to the old place, and as much of the old property as had not been sold to pay my uncle's gambling debts.

Soon after my father came into possession, Aunt Jane said she heard vague rumours that a marriage had taken place between the elder brother and the girl who had described his death, and that a child had been born. The instant this rumour reached my father's ears he started for Canada, and hastened to the place where the Canadian girl had lived, but no trace of her could be discovered.

It seemed that she had not belonged to that part of the country, and those in the

neighbourhood who remembered her and the handsome Mr. Stuart, said that she came there with him, and that she had disappeared a few weeks after my father and Mr. Mordaunt visited the place. My father now bitterly lamented that he had lost sight of the girl, but still it seemed very improbable that if she were really married she should not have declared it, and made some claim upon the family of a man who she must have heard was rich, for her own maintenance and that of the child, if such was expected to be born.

He remained some months in America, and left no means untried to obtain a clue to the whereabouts of the girl. Finding it utterly hopeless, he returned to England; and the strange rumours which had caused

all this troublesome search soon died away

Aunt Jane had almost forgotten them till she saw Mr. Mordaunt, after my father's death; and there was something in the mysterious way in which he spoke of me, and of his unexpected and arduous task of guardianship, that roused her curiosity, and reminded her of the strange old story which had been so long forgotten. But whether Mr. Mordaunt really thought there was some truth in the old vague rumour, or whether he himself purposely wished to revive it for some scheme of his own, she was unable to discover.

A few days after my arrival at Langdale Priory, I was delighted to find that my guardian was going away on business. Then I spent some most happy weeks at my new

old home ; and I visited all the poor people, with Mr. and Mrs. Mordaunt and Aunt Jane. My only anxiety was caused by hearing nothing of Carlo ; and even this cloud was soon dispelled by a letter which came from him, enclosed from Mademoiselle de Bonnevalle. It chanced to arrive at breakfast time ; and Aunt Jane was opposite to me when I read it. She said nothing at the moment, but I felt that the piercing glance of her keen eyes was upon me, and saw the deep blushes they caused. Of course she soon discovered all about it, and she endeavoured to make me describe Carlo. She did this with so much kind interest that I was quite glad to have some one to talk to about him. Yet I was rather perplexed at not being able to tell her more about his

character, or what he had said. I always thought I knew him so well, until her shrewd and searching questions made it seem as if I scarcely knew him at all.

“And now tell me why you love him?” she gravely inquired, after my ineffectual attempts to enlighten her as to his merits.

“Because I do,” was my simple and silly answer.

“Well, and are you sure he loves you?”

“Oh! yes, certainly—there can be no doubt of that.”

“I suppose not, for you are very loveable. But is he rich?—and would he love you as much if you had no fortune?”

“Oh! that would be dreadful!” I said; while a cold shudder passed through me at the idea.

“ Well, don’t look so miserable,” she said ;
and she kissed my now pale cheek. “ We
will hope for the best.”

CHAPTER IV.

ENJOYMENT.

THERE were not many neighbours near Langdale Priory, and Mrs. Mordaunt often expressed great fear lest I should find it dull. Dull!—this English word “dull,” for which no exact Italian equivalent could be found, often puzzled me; and I had never realised in myself the meaning, or rather sensation, of dulness. Miserable I had been, miserable and despairing, discontented, suffered what seemed to be agonies

at the moment ; but my wild sensations were all too active and vivid to allow room for dulness. Still less could I connect the idea of dulness with the beautiful place which inspired me with a kind of joyful adoration ; not a peaceful appreciation, but a downright actively joyous affection. I could never tire of running round the old trees, and rambling in the woods, visiting the cottages, and talking to and listening to the people, old and young, who inhabited the village near.

Then there was the library ; and I discovered my father's marks in many of the books, and they gave me a never-ending fund of interest and delight. I certainly did not inherit any of my mother's peaceful *dolce far niente* enjoyments, for I devoured with the keenest ardour books on all kinds

of subjects ; and the happy day never seemed long enough for all I wished to do.

Aunt Jane used to bring her work—little garments she was always making for the poor—and sit in the corner of the deep bay-window. She had read a good deal in English, and a little in French, but she was entirely unacquainted with German and Italian literature. So I translated passages to her as she sat at work, and her keen appreciation of the beauties of some of my favourite passages delighted me beyond measure.

“ I must take you to see my dear little friend Norah,” she said one day, in the middle of a passage I was reading to her. “ I should like you to teach her some of these languages, and other things you know,

for she has learnt little, and yet how much older in mind she is than you are ; but I don't want you to develop quickly. Suffering will do that some day, and I foresee you will have a great deal of trouble with yourself."

"Who is little Norah, and why have you never mentioned her before?"

"Because I only heard this morning she has returned to her father's home. I am afraid it will scarcely seem like a home to her again, for he married a few months ago, and, from all I hear, the poor girl will not have a satisfactory step-mother."

"Poor girl, how very sad! Do let me see her."

"Yes, we will all go and call at Chandos Mount to-morrow, and perhaps Mrs. Mor-

daunt will ask little Norah to return home with us."

The next day we started, after luncheon, in the luxurious open carriage, which I always enjoyed so much, and drove through the largest part of our beautiful park on the road to Chandos Mount.

How I did admire that thoroughly English park, with its graceful deer and splendid oaks!—its deep fern-clad dells and upland slopes, where the silvery stems of the beech-trees shone like jewelled pillars supporting gardens of richly-varied foliage. How I did enjoy the variety of colouring, the breezy, heath-scented air, all the fresh forest smells, which were so new to me, and, added to the interest of association with my dear father's memory, were all the more striking from

their contrast to anything I had seen in Italy. The glowing beauties of even Sorrento, with its richly-scented orange-groves, which had sometimes oppressed me with their power, its dazzling lights and shades, the vivid blue sea and unclouded sky, had less charm for me than the refreshing sights, and quiet, homely sounds of my own, my father's own dear park.

Then that delightfully easy open carriage, with its well-appointed horses, that drove the same quick, steady pace up and down the steepest hills of the park.

“ Well, I do enjoy riches,” thought I, with a sudden feeling of humiliation, “ and everything seems more luxurious in England, because, I suppose, people are richer.” I had been struck with the contrast of the thorough-

ly well-managed establishment at the Priory, and that of most even rich Italian houses I had seen. The quiet respectfulness of the old English servants, who seemed to do everything exactly right, with a noiseless and unbustling precision. In fact, I afterwards made up my mind that no country produces—or rather did produce in my young days—such good servants as England, and I attribute this to the natural respect the lower feel for the upper circles, from the remains of the ancient feudal system. The country which produces the worst servants is Ireland. And now I am going to say something which will shock people horribly, in these days of exaggerated sympathy with the “wrongs of Ireland.” I think the greatest wrong Ireland has to complain of is that it has never

been thoroughly amalgamated with England. Why should it not have been so (if it were formally taken possession of) as well as the races of any other country in the world have been with some other people than the first inhabitants? Of course all conquest is to be deplored; but still, if the avarice and infirmity of human nature propels people to usurpation, it must be better that the various parts should be welded into one harmonious whole.

Then came the strife of religion in Ireland, which still further retarded any harmonious settlement of rights. And, unfortunately of all strifes, those that are falsely called religious are the most deadly. Multitudes will willingly risk their lives, and die for what they think is their religion;

and still more willingly kill others for it. But, alas! how few can be found to *live for* it—to live according to God's law and Christian precepts; for if we would but do this, there would be an end of all war and strife.

But what a digression is all this from the drive to Chandos Mount, when none of these sage thoughts came into my head, for I never reasoned then—nor did I think much. I only enjoyed, thoroughly enjoyed my life, and everything around me.

CHAPTER V.

CHANDOS MOUNT.

IN the course of our drive, Aunt Jane gave us some account of the Chandos family. Mr. Chandos had been for some years a widower, with a large family, but not a large fortune. His first wife, who had no fortune of her own, had been a good manager, and contrived to sustain in some degree the respectability of the family, which was one of the oldest in the county; but various losses, and the heavy incum-

branches on the property left by his father, rendered the task of making both ends meet, at the end of the year, very difficult to a person of Mr. Chandos's average capacity.

So, after his first wife's death, his affairs soon got into sad confusion, and debts became more and more pressing, in spite of the efforts of his eldest daughter, Norah, who had lost her mother when she was only thirteen years old. She had endeavoured to follow her dear mother's example, and kept the house-accounts with the greatest care and regularity ; but the brothers were extravagant, and unforeseen school and college bills came in, and their father was over-indulgent, so that two years before, they had been on the verge of utter ruin.

The chief mortgage on the old property had been taken up by a rich tallow-chandler, who was the happy and triumphant father of one blooming daughter. Of course he wished that she should marry an earl at least; but his wife was so vulgar that he found it difficult to make his daughter acquainted with any; and, at last, they all thought it would be a good thing if the blooming girl were to become mistress of Chandos Mount, and take her place among the best families in the county.

Aunt Jane did not at all know what kind of girl the young heiress was, as she had not been in that part of the country while the projected marriage was on the *tapis*. All she knew was that poor Norah had apprehended the change most sadly, because, in

spite of all their difficulties, she had a most happy home with her father; that some few people pitied her very, very much, while others declared that Mr. Chandos had done the very best thing he could for himself and all his starving family.

“Then you must feel the greatest curiosity to see what kind of person this new Mrs. Chandos is like?” said I.

“That may not be so easy as you think, my dear child, for I believe she is only twenty-three, and with such a very disadvantageous training as she must have had, she may turn out a very different kind of person from what she probably will now appear to be—that is, if dear little Norah can ever succeed in obtaining any influence over her.”

When we arrived at the gate of Chandos Mount, Aunt Jane and Mrs. Mordaunt both exclaimed that the place was quite spoilt ; for a beautiful grove of beech-trees, which had ornamented the Mount behind the house, had been cut down, and was replaced by a large kitchen-garden, and a variety of hot-houses and conservatories. Then some fine oaks, which had adorned the lawn in front of the house, were also cut down, and replaced by a few diodaras and arocarias, and highly-fashionable garden-beds.

“ Oh ! then she has her own way in everything, I fear,” said Aunt Jane, as she lifted up her hands in dire dismay. “ All money ! —dear, dear, how much harm this nasty money does, when it is not guided by good taste and good feeling !”

“ Really ? ” inquired I, who had been gradually led to think that money did everything, because the rich Englishmen had such beautiful places, and everything seemed so expensive.

“ Yes ; and look ! they have spoilt the house, too ; the only nice old bit is gone—that old west wing, which was the only part of the original mansion, and they have built some fine modern rooms, I suppose, instead of the dear old south wainscoted parlour, with its polished and carpetless oak floor and lattice windows. Oh ! dear, I am afraid I hate the woman already ! ” she said, with a deep sigh, as we drove up to the door.

It was answered by a finely-dressed butler and several tall footmen in powder.

“Mrs. Chandos was at home, but Miss Chandos was out riding with Mr. Chandos,” was the reply. So we all got out and walked through some rooms, magnificently furnished; but they smelt so new, and everything was so heavy-looking and alike in them, that I did not at all admire them. At last we came to one which, as Aunt Jane whispered to me, had replaced her dear old oak parlour; and here great masses of yellow satin and gold oppressed our sight, and we walked on a thick carpet full of colours that seemed to clash the eye; yet, though it was over-crowded, there was a bareness, a want of habitableness in it I did not like.

No one was there, and we had time to look round on the bare walls—I mean,

bare of everything but the green damask satin, which had been strained so tight over them that it looked like glazed paper. No picture, not even a print, diversified the expanse of bareness. The ceiling was heavy with some kind of gilt tracery-work, which seemed to dazzle without embellishing.

A few books in fine bindings, which looked as if they had never been read, were laid in a precise pattern on one of the inlaid tables; on another was a costly vase, filled with some choice exotics. The costly chairs were placed at such long distances from each other, that one felt it impossible to be really sociable in the room; so we all sat down in different parts, and waited for the arrival of the owner. She was probably

changing her dress, for a long time elapsed before she appeared.

And then a great rustling of silk was heard, the door opened, and Mrs. Chandos made us a remarkably elaborate and grave bow, as she stopped short, after shutting the door. Her studied walk across the room would probably have satisfied any dancing or deportment-master, as also her greeting of the guests. She sat down as near as the large chair would permit to Mrs. Mordaunt, and expressed, in well-selected terms, the pleasure she experienced at seeing her.

“And I have often heard Miss Chandos speak of Miss Stanway,” said she, turning her head, with chin well raised, towards Aunt Jane.

“I am sorry not to find her at home,”

said Aunt Jane; "for Mrs. Mordaunt and we all had a project of trying to persuade you to let us take her home with us."

"I am sure Miss Norah will be greatly honoured by your proposal. I will tell her of your projected kind intentions, if you will commission me to do so," she said, in slow and probably studied accent.

At this moment a sound of children's voices was heard in the garden near, and an angry frown was visible on the fair lady's countenance.

"I must apologize for their bad behaviour," she said. "I hope the boys will be kept in better order when the new tutor comes. We thought it advisable to have one to supplement their education after their first school, before they go to College."

“And have you a governess, too, for the little girls?” inquired Aunt Jane.

“There has been a slight difficulty in that respect, for the one we had engaged did not turn out so well as we were induced to suppose, from the high situations in which she had resided, so we were obliged reluctantly to part with her, and are now endeavouring to find another. We have commissioned Lady Horatia Somerton to inquire, as we should prefer a French, or, rather, Italian one,” she added, as she turned round towards me with another bow and smile, that was probably intended for a compliment to the country from which I came. “Italian is such a beautiful language, it would be a pity that the girls should not acquire a pure accent. The Roman is considered the best, is it not?” she inquired.

“ I don't know,” said I, “ for I never was in Rome.”

“ Never in Rome ! That is strange. We passed a month there last Winter, and my admiration of all I saw was extreme.”

After a few more commonplace remarks, we got up and took leave of Mrs. Chandos. Mrs. Mordaunt expressing a hope that we should soon have the pleasure of seeing her and Mr. Chandos at the Priory; at which she twisted her head about, and said, with an elaborate smile,

“ I thank you for the honour of the observation.”

CHAPTER VI.

THE NEW STEP-MOTHER.

“**P**ERHAPS she tries to do her best,” said Aunt Jane, after a long silence, during our drive home, for neither Mrs. Mordaunt nor I had ventured to put into words any favourable impression of the bride.

“She shows, at all events, respect for her teacher, and takes pains to act, and look, and speak as she has been taught by the schoolmistress, or person to whom her edu-

cation has been entrusted. She is obliged to think of her words and looks, because they cannot come naturally to her, as they would to a person brought up differently; and though she cannot yet be natural, she may become so in time. For now, when she has to pronounce a word with an *h* in it she must remember that it is to be well sounded."

"Well, you do always find some excuse for everybody, or some good in them. Now, I thought it was only pretentious silliness," said Mrs. Mordaunt.

"We must remember that she is not speaking with her father or her mother, consequently she knows that we shall consider it vulgar if she spoke as they do, who put all their *h*'s wrong, and their speech is

characteristic of quite the low order from which they spring."

"But the speech of our poor cottagers is not vulgar," said I.

"No, because that is genuine, and their minds are refined by suffering and humility," said Aunt Jane. "She showed an interest in the tutor and the governess which looked kind, and almost more than one could have expected in a fine-dressed, and probably purse-proud woman, of her youth and inexperience."

"Well, I know I should not like to be her daughter-in-law," said I.

"Nor dear Norah, I fear; but we shall see. I do not profess to know Mrs. Chandos's character, or even disposition, at all, in that one interview. The improvements, or

rather disfigurement of the place, had prejudiced me more against her than her own appearance did, for I always observe more of person's characters by their rooms than by their faces. The bare and tasteless rooms of rich people, rooms unmarked with the stamp of the inhabiter's mind, however much they may have been laden with upholstery, have a much more depressing effect on me than even the interior of the poorest cottage. The latter calls forth hope. Blessed are, in fact, and will be, the poor. A life of necessary active labour must be better for the mind than the stagnating rest or leisure in which those rich people vegetate whose minds are too small and uncultivated to use their riches well."

"So that you rather regret, upon the

whole, that Mr. Chandos has given your favourite Norah a new mother?"

"Yes, for her I do; for that kind of half-bred woman, united with her loved father, must clash with her fine sensibilities. But for the rest of the family I can't say, for extreme poverty is a dreadful thing."

"Yes, it must be," said I, with a slight shudder.

"And yet you do not know what it is."

"No; but I fully know how delightful riches are, so I conclude that not to be able to have all one wants, nor be able even to relieve others, must be very, very dreadful."

"Well, don't look so grave, and remember that if, or whenever, the worst trial comes, it is never so bad as we apprehended.

And now, tell me, is Mrs. Chandos handsome or not?"

"Well, I can scarcely say, for her elaborate dress and odd manner riveted my attention more than her face, but she certainly has a good, fair complexion, fine colour, and not bad eyes; but was she not much disfigured by the way her hair was dressed?"

"Yes, I suppose so," said Aunt Jane. "She has a first-rate hairdresser for her hair, who does it in the extreme of the fashion, and that extreme is generally particularly unbecoming, for even pretty people cannot stand it. But people in general would think Mrs. Chandos handsome, I should think. She is so fresh and healthy-looking. She has a large smile, though it was put on to order when we were present, yet it had that kind of

wide-spreading ripple over her countenance that will light up her eyes, if her mind and disposition should improve ; and she has the advantage of good health, which is a great blessing, and sometimes a great help to a good development of character. Of course, the strong are never so interesting as those who habitually suffer, and yet make the best of their ailments."

CHAPTER VII.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

THE following morning Aunt Jane received a letter, which, to her great dismay and annoyance, obliged her to proceed at once to London, on some urgent business connected with her late sister's affairs. I was more particularly grieved at losing her so unexpectedly, as my guardian had written to say he was to return in a few days.

I cried most bitterly at parting, and im-

plored her to return as soon as possible, as I dreaded the arrival of Mr. Henry Mordaunt fearfully. She kissed away my tears, and her dear little brown eyes looked so hopefully into mine that I was somewhat comforted.

Aunt Jane had never been pretty, I heard, but she had the most cheering and hope-giving countenance I ever saw. I ought to have described her, but I knew when they gave me all that foolscap paper I should never write this properly. I have described nothing, only just put down the impression places and people gave my selfish self.

I think the impression her hopeful face at parting gave me, lasted all that day ; but, alas ! the next morning my guardian arrived, and there was such a look of obstinate

resolve in his face, and in the decided tones of his harsh voice, that I felt a vague and most depressing dread of some impending misfortune. This was increased when he told Mrs. Mordaunt, in a solemn and significant tone, that he had something very particular to tell me, and begged for a few minutes' conversation with me in the library.

“Oh ! come with me there !” I implored of Mrs. Mordaunt.

But he peremptorily refused this ; and she, not understanding my fears, hinted that I had better hear what he had to say.

Mrs. Mordaunt was decidedly a weak woman, though really, as well as apparently, good-natured, and I felt more angry with her at that moment than even with Mr.

Mordaunt ; but I had often observed that he had a wonderful influence over her, which I afterwards attributed to mesmerism. I often remember the exact words of the conversations I had even before that memorable one with Henry Mordaunt ; but there was something so bewildering in the statements he made in that interview, that it now seems like a terrible dream, and I cannot put it into words.

Yet nothing could be more clear than his statements, or more decisive than his words, looks, and resolutions. The result of it all was that I must either consent to be his wife, and retain for my own exclusive use and disposal Langdale Priory property ; or, in the event of my refusal, I was to lose it all, and become actually penniless.

He held in his hands the undeniable proofs that my father's elder brother had married the Canadian girl, Rosalie, and she had given birth to a son a few months after her husband's death. But as yet no one knew of this fact, except one person, who was completely in Henry Mordaunt's power, and on whose secrecy he could fully rely. Of course he declared that he loved me so deeply that he could not exist unless I consented to be his wife. He then painted in glowing colours the good I could do if I retained possession of my property and old family place; and drew an equally vivid picture of what my life would be if I were deprived of all means of subsistence; for my mother had scarcely any fortune at all. I knew we should not have sufficient to live

in the luxury to which she had always been accustomed.

He ended by declaring that if I promised to say nothing at all about this to anyone, he would allow me two days for consideration ; but without that promise he must at once declare publicly the real state of the case, and give up the property to the real heir, and re-instate him in all his rights.

“ Oh, that I could have seen Aunt Jane !” thought I. Yet there is but one thing for me to do—if my uncle had really married the girl of whom I had already heard, his son must have a right to the property, and what could be more unjust than an attempt to deprive him of it?

Then I gave vent to the anger and indignation I felt, and reproached him bitterly

for his meanness in offering to keep the matter secret.

The fact was that he had probably not given me credit for sufficient honesty of purpose. He had built upon a want of early training, and expected that I should have no objection to the subterfuge and deceit he intended, in order to save my inheritance. He soon saw the mistake he had made, and I perceived that he dreaded lest I should proclaim to the world the disgraceful conditions he had offered in the event of my consenting to be his wife.

For a moment he seemed staggered, and assumed his old oily and insinuating manner, and looking beseechingly in my eyes, said,

“Well, your beauty will be my excuse, and the wish to protect my dear friend, your

loved father's child, from loss ; and perhaps at some future time, when the world has turned its cold side towards you, and that you have experienced the loss of the Marchese Carlo's love, which I am convinced will not last when you become poor—at some future day you may be glad to accept me. For I am rich, richer than you could ever have supposed I should be. The same ship which brought the proof of your loss, brought the news that a mine, in which I had purchased shares many years ago, has become most successful, and at this moment I could easily realize a million."

"Your fortune could make no difference to me ; I would much rather starve or sweep the streets," said I, with a proud and defiant look ; at the same moment a vision of the

often-dreaded poverty gave me a cold shudder, which I endeavoured to conceal by rushing abruptly out of the room.

I ran to my own apartment, and after locking the door, threw myself on the floor in a paroxysm of despair. Yes, I was most unheroic, I was almost as rebelliously and wickedly miserable as when my dear father died nearly four years before. All the accomplishments and languages I had learnt since then, the good nun's training, the books I had read, and even the words Aunt Jane had spoken, availed nothing to quiet the rebellious anger and despair which made me writhe and tear my hair in agony.

“ But, Carlo,” I at last thought, “ he surely will not desert me; and why cannot we be happy in Italy, where, if one cannot have

luxuries, our real wants are fewer than in England ; and then my voice, so praised by composers—I could go on the stage, as many have done ; and Carlo, even if his father is angry and gave him nothing, he too has a fine voice and could act, when we might still be almost happy.

As these ideas gradually developed themselves in my mind, I rose from the floor and went to the window. But alas ! the lovely view over my favourite south gardens—the splendid woods beyond reflected in the clear water ; the village cottages or the hill beyond, surmounted by the beautiful spire of the ancient church ; the pretty school my dear father had built, and all the children I had learnt to know, and the old cottagers who talked to me of my father and the old

family : all this I must leave for ever.

Again I threw myself down in a paroxysm of despair. Soon, however, a knock at the door, and the sound of Mrs. Mordaunt's voice, roused me; and ashamed of being seen in such abject grief, I started up and smoothed my hair and dress. I had more pride, probably, though not more resignation than when I so selfishly shut myself up after my father's death. I could not bear to let Mrs. Mordaunt see how badly I bore this trial. For I concluded that she must have heard of it. But I found that she had not. She only fancied there was some bad news, because Mr. Henry looked so miserable, she said, when he came back into the drawing-room, and he had asked for a private interview with her husband. She then

looked for me in the garden, as she concluded I had gone to my favourite seat, where the table was generally covered with my books or drawing things. I then tried to describe to her all that had passed, and how it had turned out that I was no heiress at all. I say tried, because poor dear Mrs. Mordaunt was rather stupid and very slow of comprehension, and the whole thing seemed so strange that she could not understand it at all.

“But we rent this place,” she said, “and no one can turn us out till you are of age, and surely you can live here with us.”

“It must belong to—to my cousin,” said I, with a kind of vague wonder as to what sort of person this cousin, the rightful heir of the old property, was likely to be. For

a few minutes the wondering speculations about him distracted my mind from my own misfortune. Would he be like my father, and should I like him so well as to be reconciled to my loss?

“But he cannot love the place nor my dear father’s memory as I do.”

“You seem to bear all this with most proper resignation,” said Mrs. Mordaunt.

But I could not bear to be praised for what I did not deserve, so I confessed what a state of utter and most rebellious despair I had been in.

“There is no need for that either,” said the dear matter-of-fact woman; “surely you will have a right to some fortune; and then this cousin,” she said, with a sudden smile, as if surprised at her own brilliant imagining,

“who knows but this rightful heir, as you call him, will be very handsome, as I hear his father was ; and when he sees you he will certainly fall in love, and then—then you will be mistress of this place after all.”

“Oh! that is impossible,” I declared ; and then I told her for the first time of my engagement to my mother’s cousin, Carlo.

“Oh! dear, that is a sad misfortune. I don’t like foreigners at all. You know it was your dear father’s greatest misfortune that he took up with—I mean—of course you cannot help having an Italian mother, but, you know, she took him away from this place, which he loved so much, where his presence was of so much use to all the country round. You can’t think how he was

looked up to by all parties," she added. "Oh! it's a sad pity you should have gone and engaged yourself that way, and before you went to school even. I should have thought you must have forgotten each other by this time. Well, to be sure, as the maids say, things will be so contrary; but I really don't seem able to take all this in yet, nor shall I till I see what you call the rightful owner with my very own eyes."

CHAPTER VIII.

AN IRRITABLE MAN.

WHEN we went downstairs, which I did at Mrs. Mordaunt's request, after looking in the glass to see that no traces of tears were visible, we found Mr. Mordaunt in a towering passion—I mean *our* Mr. Mordaunt, for Mr. Henry had just driven off on his return to London.

This was a great relief to me, for although I was determined to face him, yet I could

not bear that he should perceive the effect his words had produced, for I could not succeed in appearing like the happy being I had been that very morning. It was also a relief to witness Mr. Mordaunt's extreme anger. He was a good, worthy man in the main, but extremely passionate.

I had sometimes observed that his anger was a sort of safety-valve, or rather a kind of excitement, that seemed almost necessary to wake up his somewhat sluggish nature. I must do him the justice to say that his bad temper was generally aroused on the side of right, in the cause of the weak or oppressed, but it made him at times a disagreeable companion, and had once or twice startled his poor wife into hysterics.

And now, instead of endeavouring to com-

fort me as poor Mrs. Mordaunt had done, the sight of my pale face seemed to increase his rage. He broke forth into a strain of invective against everyone concerned in this extraordinary affair; and then took up the defence of each, and showed that under these wonderful circumstances they could scarcely have acted otherwise. Then he drew a vivid and, I afterwards thought, rather exaggerated picture of my wrongs and utterly hopeless condition.

“Absolutely penniless! Yes, of course she is, for her mother can have nothing. Those foreign marchesas and popish counts never have a sixpence. And what is she to do, will you allow me to ask you? And what are we to do? For of course the man, or boy, will want to come here, and

there is an end of our tenancy. And *we* can give the girl nothing."

"Oh! Mr. Mordaunt, don't say that!" said his wife, with tears in her eyes. "I am sure she's welcome——"

"Welcome to what? Yes, very well, very well. But you always forget we have nothing beyond our lives. The greater part of our income is the jointure you got from your first husband, which of course dies with you; and all I have is strictly entailed on my nephew; and we have never saved a sixpence. On the contrary, when I die, there will be debts—as sure as I am alive there will."

"Oh! dear, this is very sad, and——"

"Of course it is. Whichever way you look at it, it's utterly hopeless. Then a girl

brought up in luxury, who of course can do nothing even for herself, much less for her mother, thrown on the wide world, and obliged to become a governess, perhaps, as so many poor ladies have in these hard times ; and probably not even fit for that."

"Oh ! but while we live, Mr. Mordaunt," interposed his wife.

"While we live, indeed ! And who can ensure our lives even till to-morrow morning ? And where is the girl to go then, allow me to ask ?"

"Why, there's Aunt Jane," suggested Mrs. Mordaunt, with a face of horror at the idea of her own and her husband's certain death before the next morning.

"Aunt Jane, indeed !—why, that's still worse. She has only quite a small annuity ;

and all she saves and contrives to pinch and screw out of it by dressing like a common person, must go to her starving niece, the fool who made the bad match with that Indian scoundrel—more fool she! Then there's the arrears, too. What's to become of all the sums your father has received for all these years?"

"Arrears! What are they?" I inquired, with sudden dread.

"Of course you know nothing of business. I was sure you could not. How could a girl brought up in a Popish convent know anything of business? Yes, miss, there's the arrears ever since your father took possession of the property on his father's death. He would have been made answerable for them had he lived, and now—and now we

have not yet looked at the worst feature of this—this d——d—this unfortunate case.”

He contrived, after a pause, to make a violent effort to find words to substitute for the curses he had been formerly in the habit of using, I was told, before his marriage.

“We have not yet looked at the worst,” he repeated, while his excited countenance seemed to brighten up still more at the idea of an additional grievance ; for he certainly enjoyed his anger, and he perhaps enjoyed it all the more from feeling that his wrath was not excited by any one person in particular, but only against these most adverse circumstances in general. “For, of course, people will blame your father for not having discovered that his brother had married that cur—that Canadian girl. Of course ill-

natured people will even say that he knew of it all along, and wished deliberately to defraud his eldest brother's son."

"Oh! impossible!" I exclaimed, when the horror of my father being thus blamed seemed worse than anything that could befall me, and I sank down on the floor in an agony of grief, which seemed to dry up the sources of my tears.

"There! see what you have done," moaned poor Mrs. Mordaunt. "You will kill her! Really, it is very unfeeling of you to talk to her in that way."

"I beg pardon," said Mr. Mordaunt, who was really frightened at the effect of his words. "I—I don't mean, my dear young lady—pray don't imagine—I—besides, you are not to blame in any way."

“ But if my father is, or can be blamed, I shall never be happy again. I—I don’t care what becomes of myself. I—could scrub the floors, or anything, but I could not—I will not live a day, if my dear father is——”

“ Ah ! well, now I am really sorry I said such a thing. There, don’t think any more about it. I will put your case—your father’s case—into the hands of the only honest lawyer there is—for they are such fools—and we will see what can be done. Henry maintains that the best authorities have been consulted, and I suppose he would not have declared the thing unless it was beyond doubt. Still, I have a great opinion of Graspem and Snareland, and I’ll write. Stay, I’ll go up to London the first thing

to-morrow morning—or, stay, I may not be alive then. Ring the bell, Martha, and I'll order the buggy directly, and I'll drive to the station, and I'll see Graspem this very night, before I go to bed. There—confound the bell!—the servants are so slow. I'll go to the stable and order it myself; and, Martha, you see to my carpet-bag."

"But you will not go till after dinner?" said Mrs. Mordaunt. "Remember, you never eat luncheon."

"Confound—I mean, never mind the luncheon. I can get something at the station. Where's the 'Bradshaw?' Of course, not to be found! There, my dear Miss Vivian, cheer up, and don't despair till I come back from London, and till you really know the worst. And mind," he added, as

he saw my look of intense misery—"mind, no really sensible or good person can ever blame your father."

Somewhat consoled by Mr. Mordaunt's kind zeal in my behalf, I sat down to write an account of the whole case to Aunt Jane. I implored her to come and see me, and advise what I was to do in this most perplexing case. But the next morning's post dashed my hopes of seeing her, for a letter came to say she was just starting for Madeira, to attend upon her niece, who they feared was dying.

The letter I had written to her the night before was not yet posted, and now it might be weeks, perhaps months, before it reached her. This was a most fearful addition to my sufferings, for I saw it was most impor-

tant for me at once to decide on some course of action, and find some means to earn my bread. I must write to my mother and to Carlo; and oh! how I shrank from telling him of my poverty! No, I would not write to him, until I could see some means of gaining my own living. I would not be a burden, or—tears blinded my eyes as I thought of this, and I felt quite unequal to write even to my mother. As I sat at the writing-table in my bed-room, utterly unable to do anything, I heard a carriage drive up to the door.

It could not be Mr. Mordaunt, for no train came back from London so early, but I ran to the window of the next room, which looked towards the north entrance. It was an open barouche, and I saw two ladies get out.

I fancied the tallest looked like Mrs. Chandos, and the little one—yes, that pretty fair face and light flowing curls, must be Norah—the little sensible Norah that Aunt Jane was always talking about.

I liked her air and her light buoyant step as she ascended the flight of stone steps; and as she paused for a moment to look at the lovely view, and then up at the window, she caught a sight of my face. The smile she gave me was very pleasant, there was something so informal, so genuine in its childlike expression—the kind of smile with which one young playfellow might greet another, expressing the anticipation of sunny hours and all kinds of innocent fun together. Mind, I did not think all this at that moment. I was only wonderfully pleased at meeting

with the kind of unconventional greeting I had never seen before, and the impression her whole appearance gave me resolved itself into the words, "What a contrast to me!"

She was as fair as I was dark ; her eyes were blue and laughing, while mine were dark and passionate in their intensity ; I was tall and fully developed, she was short and slim. The only point we had in common—at least before the unfortunate discovery I had made the day before—was a look of genuine happiness.

"Then she is happy with her new mother after all," I thought. I longed to see more of her, but I felt, under the strange cloud that now hung over me, it would be awkward to appear. So I went back to my

room, and tried to read, but could fix my attention to nothing. I had a sort of vague hope that she must have felt I should be glad to see her, and I half expected that she would ask Mrs. Mordaunt to send for me.

I found afterwards that she had, but Mrs. Mordaunt, thinking I should not like to be seen or disturbed, had made some lame kind of excuse about my having heard bad news, and was suffering from a headache.

When I heard the carriage drive up to the door again, I ran to the same window; and this time I saw that she purposely looked up, in evident hopes of seeing me. Another still more hopeful smile, a little graceful nod of her pretty head and waving sunny ringlets, while her hand was play-

fully raised, and her little fingers wafted a childlike, happy greeting.

“What a little darling!” I thought, as she tripped down the steps; and then, as the carriage drove off, she turned round and gave me another greeting. I saw that Mrs. Chandos observed this, for she put out her hand, and said something which I feared might be a reproof for the young girl’s unusual demonstrativeness to a stranger.

CHAPTER IX.

COULD I BE A GOVERNESS?

I WATCHED the carriage till it disappeared at the turn of the road among the oaks, and then I suddenly remembered that Mrs. Chandos had said they were looking out for an Italian governess. “Why should not I inquire whether they would take me?” It seemed the easiest and readiest plan; but—I knew nothing of governesses except what I had read about them

in novels ; and these generally gave a fearful picture of the hardships of their lives, and the unkind treatment they met with. Still they were often heroines ; and their stories sometimes ended happily.

I had never even seen a live governess myself, and had no idea what I might be expected to teach, or how I was to teach at all. Italian !—well, I could read to the children in that language ; but then as I had never even learnt it myself—I mean that it was my native language—I should find it even more difficult to teach than I should other languages which the good nuns had taught me in the convent. Still, I could but try ; and the attractive figure of that little fairy, Norah, seemed to smoothe many difficulties, so I ran downstairs and

disclosed my plan very triumphantly to Mrs. Mordaunt.

But the matter-of-fact slowness with which she spoke of the madness and impossibility of my scheme was a sad damper. She declared that it would be a disgrace to the whole family; that such a thing was never heard of; that Mrs. Chandos might as well propose to engage one of the Duke of L——'s daughters for her governess, if they were poor. And why could I not live with her?

“Because you know that Mr. Mordaunt said yesterday that it was impossible, for many reasons.”

“But I do not think as he does when he is angry—that we are both to die before the next morning, and leave nothing but debts

behind us. You must not attend to what he says when he is in that state of excitement."

"Well, but I should like to do something to be independent," I said, with a feeling of utter depression. For I felt I should not like to live for ever with Mrs. Mordaunt, though she certainly was a very good woman. I then asked her whether Miss Chandos told her that she had seen me at the window?

"Yes," she said; "and I wondered how you happened to be in that corner room. Mrs. Chandos quite apologised for poor Norah's having taken the liberty to nod to you without having been introduced. It *was* odd of her," she added, after a pause. "But, do you know, I always thought she

was an odd girl ; and never could quite see why Aunt Jane raved about her so. And she is not accomplished either—she can't play or sing half so well as you ; and she don't draw ; and——”

“ Oh ! but I thought she was quite charming. I never saw a more attractive face, even at that distance.”

“ She's a nice little girl, that's all ; but she is not to be compared with—— Well, never mind, but I agree with Mr. Mordaunt about looks, and we both admire quite a different style of beauty.”

It may sound vain, but I knew she meant me, for I sometimes had remarked that she seemed quite absorbed in looking at me ; and now I felt half annoyed because she could not appreciate a style of beauty which

I admired so much more than I did my own.

“I always thought you liked Norah Chandos. You seemed to agree with what Aunt Jane said of her.”

“Yes, I think she is a good girl, and certainly behaved very well to all her brothers and sisters after her mother’s death; but still I thought she was unlike other girls. She was more childish, and yet like an old person, too. That odd mixture puzzles me, for I am not clever, like Aunt Jane, and cannot judge of people or character as she does. I only know what I see, and even then one’s often deceived. I might be deceived in you now, for I never quite know what to think about you. I’m so puzzled, often.”

The post had not yet gone out, so I added a postscript to the letter I had written the evening before to Aunt Jane, and told her of my having seen Norah from the window, and of my wish to be engaged as governess in that family. She had fortunately given her niece's address in Madeira, but what a weary time I should have to wait for her answer!

The next evening Mr. Mordaunt returned from London, and we saw at once, by his face, that he had no good news to tell. We perceived that he was still angry, because, instead of greeting us with his usual somewhat formal civility, he found fault with the footman for having let the drawing-room fire out. He was a very chilly man, and although it was Summer, there was always a

fire in the evenings in the large north drawing-room where we sat.

“Dined, I suppose? Oh! never mind. I had a tough cutlet and some infernal sherry at the station.”

In vain Mrs. Mordaunt suggested that a good dinner could be ready in five minutes, and that she was sure he ought to have some after the long railroad journey. He sharply refused, and continued resolutely to spread out his thin hands over the fire, which he declared obstinately refused to burn.

“Did you see your nephew, Sir Alfred Rivers?” inquired Mrs. Mordaunt, who probably did not wish to question him about the important business.

“No, of course not. How could I have had time to call anywhere?”

“No ; but I thought you might have met him at your club.”

“Oh ! dear, no. Sir Alfred is sure to have too many engagements at this gay season. You know he is quite the fashion, and all the silly women in London are making up to him, and spoil the boy quite, they will. He will never be good for a country life after it all.”

“Oh ! if he finds a good wife he may,” suggested Mrs. Mordaunt. “And I’m sure I hope he will, for he is so clever and handsome, and good too. I hope——”

“I heard of him at Crockford’s,” said Mr. Mordaunt, with increased gravity.

“Oh ! dear, this is a misfortune !”

“Yes, of course it is ; but what can one expect now-a-days, when gambling is actu-

ally made respectable? I mean when splendid rooms are built, and titled men are the first who openly frequent the confounded gambling tables."

I listened with some interest to these remarks, because Aunt Jane had sometimes talked with them about this nephew, and she had praised his fine nature and brilliant qualities.

At last Mr. Mordaunt looked at me with a kind of compassionate interest, which he seemed to be angrily trying to conceal; for he never could bear to show his good or kind feelings.

"Well, miss, nothing can be worse. Graspem has seen the marriage certificate, and the register of baptism of the son of Henry Mordaunt Vivian, dated February

10, 18—. And the young man is expected in the next steamer—always lived in the backwoods, or some such outlandish place—had no education, I suppose. A pretty mess he'll make here—bring a black woman, probably, and several negro children. Whatever will this old place, these fine rooms, be to all those savages, will you allow me to ask you?"

I then ventured to disclose my plan of going out as governess to him.

"Well done, my dear young lady!—and serve them all right, too. A fine, handsome young lady turned out of house and home—one of the oldest, I may say *the* oldest family in the county, obliged to engage herself as governess! No, no; of course that is impossible, as long as my wife and I live; only

mind, we can do nothing for you after we die. No, no, pray do not talk of the governess plan any more."

I saw it would be useless then, but I did not give up my idea, and only hoped that perhaps Mrs. Chandos, when she heard of the misfortune which must banish the Mordaunts as well as myself from the Priory, would call again ; and then I determined to see her and offer myself to her as governess.

CHAPTER X.

NEWS FROM CARLO AT LAST.

IT was Carlo's turn to write, for I had received no letter since the one I wrote soon after my arrival at Langdale Priory, and I anxiously expected to hear from him every day. None came, and a week passed before Mr. Mordaunt heard anything more from my guardian, who had told him that he need form no plans for leaving the Priory till the new Mr. Vivian should arrive from

America. He had told him, when they met at Graspem's in London, that it was just possible Mr. Vivian might be willing to let the place for a time, though he fancied not at so low a rent as he now paid.

“And we cannot afford to give a farthing more, so there's an end of it,” moaned Mr. Mordaunt; “so you had better pack up and be ready to start at a moment's notice.”

Another week passed, and brought no letter from Carlo, and no news from Mr. Henry or Mr. Vivian. I began to be very anxious about Carlo, but, on the other hand, the delay of Mr. Vivian's arrival inspired me with a vague hope that something might occur to—no, that would be impossible, I well knew, but I felt such a yearning affection for every tree and knoll in this beauti-

ful old place, that it seemed almost impossible I could be torn from it.

At the end of that week, the post brought me a letter from Carlo, and I ran up to my room and read it alone. It was much shorter than usual, but he excused himself for its brevity by saying that he was night and day in attendance upon his father, who had been dangerously ill. He expressed much pleasure to hear that I found Langdale Abbey such an enchanting place ; but yet the letter was cold—there was not a word about our future meeting ; and the impression it produced on a second reading was worse, and formed itself into the fatal words, “ He does not now care for me.”

Or could he have been jealous of my evident enthusiasm for this place ? Could

he have discovered what I had almost reproached myself for feeling at one moment, that I loved this place almost better than him? If so, I deserve to lose his love, thought I; but still, now that I had lost the place, how sad to lose his love as well! And he could not possibly have heard of my loss, I thought. It did not seem to be generally known even here. How much less could the news have reached the south of Italy!

There seemed now no end to my troubles. At that time I had very little religion, as will be imagined by those who read this story of my life. When happy, I enjoyed a kind of vague trust in God's mercy; and also perhaps I felt some degree of gratitude, but I did not think upon His

laws, nor endeavour to bring His precepts into the daily concerns of my life ; consequently I was utterly depressed, or despairingly miserable, at the disappointments I met with. The apparent coldness of Carlo's letter was a bitter disappointment, particularly to one like myself, who, as I afterwards discovered, had such an ardent craving to be loved as I possess.

Ah ! it was this violent wish to be loved that entailed all my misfortunes ; and now that I began to doubt of Carlo's, I longed for the love, the real friendship of that attractive girl, Norah. And she had seemed disposed to like me. I saw it in her face ; and I felt that I should really like to live in the same house with her, even as governess to her sisters. Oh ! if I could but see

her, and talk to her about this plan of mine !

So far my wishes to see her were soon destined to be realized, for that very afternoon I heard the sound of carriage wheels, and, running into the next room, I saw the same carriage drive up to the door. Again Norah looked up, and this time her energetic greeting was mingled with a kind of mournful compassion, or rather, veneration, and she seemed as if her former playful recognition was exchanged for a look of serious longing to be of use. So I construed it, and felt sure they had heard of my misfortune.

Mrs. Chandos also looked up, and gave a kind of hesitating bow, which she seemed endeavouring to make according to her

usual formal pattern. Exactly what I wished now happened, for after a few moments, in which I was revolving in my mind how I could see Norah alone, I heard Mrs. Mordaunt's step in the passage, accompanied by a light, buoyant tread, which I was sure was Norah's.

I ran to the door, and found her full of tears and smiles, and, with outstretched hands, she said, .

“It is so good of Mrs. Mordaunt to let me come up to your room.”

To Mrs. Mordaunt's infinite surprise, I rushed into Norah's arms, and kissed both her cheeks. Then I held her shoulders, and looked into her face, and fully enjoyed its kind, and cheering, and loving expression.

Then Mrs. Mordaunt left us, and we had

a long and delightful talk. In that hour I told her everything—my engagement to Carlo, my adoration for this place and my father's memory, my disappointment in Carlo, and my wish to be independent, and, above all, to live with her, if possible.

“It will be difficult, I fear,” she said, after a long pause. “I am only just beginning to understand my step-mother, and she me. I am in hopes that there is more good in her than I thought there was at first. I was, oh! so miserable, for I feared she cared for nothing but dress and show, and the things riches could procure. For I am not clever, you know—I can't read characters as Aunt Jane does.”

It seemed like the next moment only, although we had told each other so much,

when Mrs. Mordaunt returned to say that Mrs. Chandos was obliged to go now, and must take Norah away; but we were all to go over and lunch at Chandos Mount the next day.

“That is, if we are all still here; for Mr. Mordaunt says it is useless to make any engagement, when we may be obliged to leave this very evening.”

This well-timed visit of Norah's had been of great use, but there was a sad re-action after she was gone, when I read Carlo's letter again. There was not much in the words themselves to make me doubt his love, and I could scarcely account for the feeling of disappointment, which seemed almost like despair. It seemed so hard that I should lose his love just at this moment, when I

was deprived of my father's beautiful place, and all the fortune I had valued so highly.

Strange that I had always dreaded poverty so much, and perhaps over-valued splendour and luxury, and all that riches could command. And now I was poor and unloved. What could I do? I could have been almost happy without marrying Carlo—I mean that I could have given up the engagement rather than entail my poverty on him, but I could not bear to lose his love. No, if he became ever so rich, I would not marry him if I doubted of his love, as that letter had made me doubt. Could he have heard of it? Could that horrible Henry Mordaunt have written to tell him of it? Oh! no. Had Carlo heard of my poverty, that would certainly not make him cease to love me!

Yet Mr. Henry had said it would. In that dreadful interview he warned me that Carlo would not fulfil the engagement if he knew I was poor. Then I resolved to write and tell him the exact truth, and release him from the engagement, if he ceased to care for me; at all events he was free.

I wrote a number of letters, and tore them up one after another. At last I succeeded in writing one which I determined to send, without reading it over again, though I knew it did not express half that I wanted to say.

CHAPTER XI.

PERVERSENESS.

A FEW days after I sent my letter to Carlo, the long-dreaded event occurred. A special messenger arrived to inform Mr. Mordaunt that Mr. Vivian was in London, and intended to come and take possession of Langdale Priory. The messenger also brought a letter from Mr. Graspem, which, with many murmuring and angry speeches, Mr. Mordaunt showed me.

“I suppose you won’t understand it? Women never can comprehend lawyers’ letters, or anything about business—of course you can’t; and this is a most confounded and infernal—beg your pardon, but it is the worst piece of business I ever came across. I see you don’t understand it. Well, I commissioned Graspem to do all he could for you, and, you see, he gives some hope that you and your mother will obtain a small income.”

“But if we have no right to any, how can Mr. Graspem do this?”

“Because, as widow, she must be entitled to some provision or jointure; and though, you see, he says that he does not like the looks of Mr. Vivian, and has no opinion of his man of business, who came with him to

England, still, something must be done ; and Mr. Henry Mordaunt is also most anxious that a suitable arrangement should be made for both you and your mother."

"We will take nothing from him, I am determined," I replied, with proud defiance.

"Of course not, my dear young lady—not from him, no ; but you and your mother are fairly, in common justice, entitled to a settlement. It must—it shall be ; and if Graspem does not secure it for you, I give him up."

I found that Mrs. Chandos (at Norah's suggestion, I concluded) had made Mrs. Mordaunt promise that we should all go there for a few days whenever we left the Priory—in fact, they wished us to stay at

Chandos Mount until Mr. Mordaunt had found a house to suit him either in London or some other place.

This plan, and my sudden affection for Norah, somewhat mitigated the pang of leaving my own beautiful home ; yet still I felt most miserable, and as we drove away through the lovely park, I thought I could never be happy again. I could not even cry ; a sort of dull despair seemed for the present time to numb all my faculties.

Since Carlo no longer cared for me, and I was destined never to see my father's loved home again, I seemed to have lost all interest in life. Even the cheering affection of Norah, and Mrs. Chandos's elaborate attempt to do the right thing towards me, failed to revive my spirits, and I

scarcely remarked her shortcomings or vulgarities.

As long as we had remained at the Priory, I suppose I never fully realised that I had lost it, and I only now began to lose all hope, and understand the full extent of the misfortune ; so I wasted those few days when, had I been less stupidly absorbed in my selfish misery, the pure and soothing words and looks of Norah would have done me infinite good. However, the after-impressions they made were not lost, for long afterwards they returned, like the recollection of some pleasant dream.

But I was thus getting hardened and utterly insensible to any good influence. Mr. Mordaunt did not accompany us to Chandos Mount, but went straight to London, to look

for a house, and see what Graspem was doing about my affairs.

At the end of a week he arrived, and informed me that an arrangement had been made; and that in fact, he said, "you are of course entitled to the small pittance of a hundred a year, and your mother will have two hundred a year paid to her regularly as long as she lives. So now, you see, my dear young lady, you will at any rate be independent, and can either live with your mother or with us, which we should much prefer. In fact, our cousin Lady Horatia Somerton, who saw you at your convent in Paris, has set her heart on taking you out in London."

"Lady Horatia Somerton; oh, I remember—handsome, tall, and dark. Ah, yes, she

did seem to like or admire me, now I remember."

"Yes, and she says you would be quite the reigning beauty if she were to introduce you; so you really can't do better, and then you will marry some rich man of high rank, and get perhaps a finer place of your own than the Priory after all."

"And Carlo!" I thought, as the vision of possible splendour rose before me.

"Well, if Carlo really does not care for me, it may be well to show him that others do, and now I should be loved for myself alone."

I had confessed to Norah my affection for Carlo, but I did not breathe a word of this new ambitious thought and wish into her ears. I was silent and reserved during the

remainder of the visit, and she saw that she had less power to amuse or cheer me than before my uncle's return, although she knew that he brought comparatively good news. But I instinctively felt that she was too pure and good to understand, or rather to tolerate, the evil and ambitious feelings which seemed to have corrupted my nature, and I shrank from the pure, lovely expression of her eyes.

And so the last hour arrived, and all her dear kind efforts to make me speak or tell her my real thoughts or feelings were unavailing.

“But you will write to me,” she said, “will you not?—and pray tell me sometimes your real thoughts; won't you? Oh, if you could but see Aunt Jane, I am sure she

would do you good, for you do want some good."

"That I do indeed, but I feel so wicked that even Aunt Jane could have no influence over me."

"Oh, yes, she could and so could I; now that you feel conscious of not thinking quite right."

I shook my head, but I kissed her with real affection, and the first tears I had shed since I left the Priory left the traces on her pretty cheeks. And she wept too, not, as she often told me, so much from grief at my departure, as for joy at seeing that I was at last touched, and my prideful, rebellious feelings were softened.

Mr. Mordaunt had not yet found a house to suit them, so we were going on a visit to

our cousin, Lady Horatia ; and she was going to give a grand ball the following week.

She had married two daughters very successfully, Mr. Mordaunt told me ; and now she had only one left, who was not yet out. Lady Horatia Somerton was said to be very worldly, but I believe it was only because she fully enjoyed the world, and more particularly the London world, the peculiarly exclusive world of London society in those days.

I mean that she was apparently devoid of the meanness which generally accompanies and is a part of worldliness. She fully enjoyed agreeable society ; she liked to be admired, and, above all, she liked to be successful—to have the pleasantest people,

without caring much whether they were either rich or titled,—to pass through life on the agreeable wings of pleasant companionship, and to hover above the realities and cares of existence, without being distressed much by anything. She had sufficient feeling to take a kindly interest in the concerns of her friends and acquaintances, without sharing their deeper sorrows. She had a fair share of beauty, with fair health and an even temper ; and was full of all the qualities of a good chaperon, for she was never tired, and seldom bored.

But there were not so many bores admitted into the exclusive society of those days as there have been since. In fact, London society may well be described in Lord Houghton's description of "Miss Berry's

Parties," where

"None were sad, and few were dull."

And where

"No taunt or scoff obscured the wit,

That there rejoiced to reign ;

They never could have laughed at it,

If it had carried pain.

"There needless scandal, e'en though true,

Provoked no bitter smile,

And even men of fashion grew

Benignant for awhile."

I had never been in London before (for it was already night when we passed through on our way from Folkestone to the Priory), and all the dingy and miserable looks of the suburbs, the straight rows of melancholy streets, made me very sad. A kind of listless ill-humour was added to my mood of rebellious despair, as we drove up to Lady Horatia's house in Cavendish Square. She

was not at home, but we were shown up into the drawing-room, which was full of good pictures, and old china, and curiosities, and had an air of refinement and good taste, which somewhat revived my spirits.

We had scarcely time to look at the pictures by my favourite old artists, before Lady Horatia came home; and there was something in the tone of her voice, and the hearty greeting she gave us, that revived me still more. After kissing me, with an approving nod, she led me to the window, and then scanned me from head to foot, as if I were a picture.

“Delightful!” was her exclamation, after a long pause. “She will make the greatest sensation anyone has made since the little Bramham girl. She shall—she must go with

me to the Duke of D——'s ball to-morrow night. Yes; don't say a word. I'll write a note this moment, and say I shall bring you. And now about your dress. Ah! I thought you would have none that would do. I will see to that, and consult with Adèle. Now take off your bonnet, and let me look at your hair. Splendid! Of course you dress it yourself? Yes, stick to that; never let anyone touch that hair of yours, because I see by your eyes you have good taste and originality. Now you only want one thing to make you perfect."

"What is that?" I asked, with some curiosity.

"What you had by nature, but have lately lost—happiness. Of course you cannot get over your misfortunes all at once;

but you must remember that it is well known, and you will be pointed out as the great heiress who lost all her fortune, and therefore (don't interrupt me) you must show people that you are above minding it." Then, turning to Mrs. Mordaunt, she said, "It would have been too much—that beauty with a fortune besides. She will have endless offers; and will have the satisfaction that she is loved for herself alone."

I scarcely knew whether to be pleased or affronted at her observations; but there was something in the genial expression of her face and melodious sound of her voice that cheered me in spite of myself, and I felt that I ought to be pleased at the notice and the interest she seemed so causelessly and unexpectedly to have taken in me.

For I had heard that the Duke of D——'s parties were considered the best in London. Norah told me that, as a great favour, she had been taken to one by her aunt early in the season, and she knew numbers of people who were dying to get invitations, and had no chance; therefore it was certainly very kind of Lady Horatia to take me there. Still I made some objection. I had never been at any ball, and never seen any other dancing than the girls in the convent with our dancing-master.

“Very glad you have not—it will be all the more new and enjoyable for you.” And she clapped her hands with glee.

CHAPTER XII.

MY FIRST BALL.

AFTER dinner there was a grand consultation about my dress, and Lady Horatia Somerton's little daughter, Letitia, came in to assist at it. She was not at all pretty, but she had such a pleasant *abond* and graceful movements, that I felt quite attracted towards her; and then she evidently admired me, and entered most warmly into the details of my intended toilette. She was about twelve years old, and though

she was, I heard, the plainest of Lady Horatia's daughters, was decidedly her favourite.

"I shall never bring myself to part with little 'Ugly;' and if any man should ever fall in love with such a plain girl, he must submit to live with me," said she, as little "Ugly" (as she often called her) went upstairs to fetch a wreath of red camellias, which they wanted to try on my head.

She soon tripped back with it on her own head, and dancing a *pas de zephyr* along the room, took it gracefully off, and placed it on mine. Then she danced round me, mimicking, as her mother said, the famous opera-dancers of those days. I had never seen such beautiful dancing before. I asked with some alarm whether I should

be expected to do such beautiful steps at the ball.

“No, quite the reverse, for good dancing is going out of fashion. People appear to walk through quadrilles, and there is no animation except in the waltz. Now get away, little Brownie, and let me arrange the wreath in her hair. Isn't she so like one of those little fairies Croften Croker calls Brownies in his Irish fairy legends, with her little brown face and malicious eyes? What a complexion the child has! yet it makes a foil for your dazzling white skin. How came you to preserve such a fair complexion all through the fifteen Summer suns of Italy that shone upon you? Yet you have Italian eyes, and the old Grecian type of nose. There, the camellias suit admirably;

and look, Brownie, she is instinctively following the directions given in the last number of *Le Follet*—‘With this style of head-dress the mouth should be worn partly open!’ Now, don’t shut your mouth up on purpose; give the natural play to your lips; there is no occasion for you to say ‘plum,’ as the beautiful Duchess of R—— did when she came into a room.”

They decided that my dress should be plain white tarlatane over muslin, looped up here and there with red camellias.

“Nothing expensive; *you* need never dress expensively, my dear Miss Vivian.”

“I am glad of that, for I have no idea how far the hundred a year they say I am to have will go, and I must contrive soon to go and live with my mother at Sorrento.

She will want me, now that she will not be able to have so many comforts and luxuries."

"On the contrary, my dear," said Lady Horatia, "she will be much better pleased that you should see a little of the world, and take the place you ought to have as your father's daughter in London society. You know that your dear father was a very old friend of mine, and that was why I came to see you at the convent in Paris. I esteemed—in fact, I really loved your father very much ; and you are like him, so that it gives me real pleasure to do what I know he would approve of, and I shall not let you run away before I have launched you forth in the great world."

"Then you do not think that anyone

supposes my father was to blame for not discovering this heir—that his brother had left a son?”

“Perhaps they do, and therefore I am more anxious that you should become the fashion. Ah! I have stirred up your spirit now; I see by your eyes I’ve found out the handle by which I may move you.”

Mrs. Mordaunt would not go out at all in the world, and Mr. Mordaunt was happier at his club than anywhere else; but they both inspected me after I was dressed the next evening, and expressed much pleasure, and approval of my appearance.

Lady Horatia was very becomingly attired, but she said she was not reckoned a good dresser, and was often abused for wearing shabby old things.

“ But the fact is I never bestowed sufficient time or money on it ; but don’t think I despise good dressers—on the contrary, I agree with my friend Lady S——, that it is often well to cultivate a taste for frivolity, and also the wish to please, which ought to be the actuating motive to dress well. Now, there is the carriage, and we had better start, that we may avoid a long string, and have a little chat with the Duke before the crowd arrives. So we drove off, and soon entered the great gates of D—— House. But a number of people had already arrived, and were going up the staircase between what appeared like banks of beautiful plants. The smell of orange flowers, and other exotics, recalled the scenery of Sorrento and Carlo’s face so vividly to my mind that

I became quite faint, and so deadly pale that Lady Horatia asked if I was ill.

“Oh ! no,” I said, as my pride became excited at the conviction that Carlo no longer cared for me. “Oh ! no, it was only the smell of those flowers—they are so powerful.”

“Ah ! yes. I knew an Italian lady who always fainted even at the smell of a rose. Come on, we will pass by those people, and hurry on to the drawing-room. That’s right, you have got your colour again ; and more beautiful than ever.”

Everybody seemed to know Lady Horatia, and tried to speak to her ; but she only gave a smile or nod as she passed quickly by them ; and we soon found ourselves in the ball-room, where she pointed out the

Duke at the farther end. As we walked quickly across the open space, I could not help seeing a number of eyes and glasses levelled towards us ; and as we approached the Duke, the surrounding group was gazing at me with wondering curiosity.

“Here is the daughter of your old friend,” said Lady Horatia, as she shook hands with him. “I knew you would be glad to see her.”

“I am indeed ; and most grateful to you for bringing her. I hope this is your first ball,” he added, as he took my hand, and looked with a kindly and respectful curiosity in my face. “She is like him ; but more like her mother, who, I well remember, was a great beauty. Now the dancing is

going to begin, and I will introduce you to—" and he looked round for a minute, as if to seek for some one, then said, "Where's Dalton?—ha! he's engaged. Here, Woodford, I want to introduce you to Miss Vivian."

Lord Woodford was rather handsome, but I did not like the expression of his eyes, nor what I thought was the conceited and dictatorial tone of his voice in which he asked,

"Where's Dalton? He must be our *vis-à-vis* in the quadrille. Your first ball, is it?" he inquired, as he looked round and scanned me from head to foot, with an expression which implied a great compliment, but did not please me so much as the respectful admiration of the Duke's kindly gaze.

“And how came you to be under the wing of that great lady?”

“What great lady?” I stupidly asked.

“Why, Lady Horatia Somerton, to be sure. Are you so very new that you did not know that she is almost the greatest lady in London?”

“I only knew that she was an old friend of my father’s, and that she is very kind to me.”

“Yes, she is the fashion now, and that is a thing,” he added, rather dogmatically, “that no rank, nor beauty, nor riches will ensure.”

Now Lady Horatia was only an earl’s daughter, of not a very old family; and her husband was only a country squire of average fortune.

“I suppose, then, merit and goodness caused her popularity?”

“Far from it, Miss Vivian—rather the reverse, in some cases, though not in Lady Horatia’s, for she is beyond reproach.”

He continued to give a long disquisition on the ingredients requisite to become “the fashion,” but my attention was arrested by one of the dancers in our quadrille, a tall, handsome man, whose face reminded me of something I had seen in the sunny south. I strove in vain to remember where or what it was. I fancied that he was also looking at me with a puzzled expression, as if I produced exactly the same mysterious recollection in him.

“You are not listening to what I say, I perceive, Miss Vivian. Are you, too, falling

in love with the Apollo of Beaudesert, for I see he has been looking at you ever since we began dancing."

"The Apollo of Beaudesert!—why is he so called, and what is his real name?"

"Ah! I see I am right, then; but have you met him before?"

"I cannot yet make out; he reminds me so of something long, long ago. But who is he?"

"One of the greatest *partis* of the day—Sir Alfred Rivers."

"Ah! then I have heard something about him from my cousin, Mr. Mordaunt—his uncle, I think. But that is not what his face reminds me of."

"I'll do the good-natured thing, and introduce you to each other when the dance

is over. Mind, it is very disinterested of me, for I might have monopolized the new beauty a little longer," he added, with a kind of mocking bow, which I did not like. But his good-natured plan was not destined to be carried out, for Sir Alfred and his partner disappeared so quickly at the end of the quadrille that he seemed quite lost in the crowd. "Well, never mind ; he will be sure to be heard of in the course of the evening."

I could not help feeling disappointed, for there was something wonderfully attractive in his whole appearance, and he is—yes, he is even handsomer than Carlo, who had hitherto been my beau-ideal of perfection. I was introduced to several other partners, and danced incessantly ; but I looked about

in vain for the only person I wished to see, and there was nothing particularly attractive in any of my partners.

During one of the short intervals between the dances, when I was near Lady Horatia, she whispered to me—

“Well, my dear, it has been a great success, even beyond my anticipation, for real beauty is not always appreciated at first. But how is this?—you don’t look as if you fully enjoyed your triumph.”

“Oh! yes, I really do enjoy the ball immensely,” said I; and at that moment I saw Sir Alfred coming towards us.

“Ah! you have not yet been introduced, I see, to Miss Vivian,” said Lady Horatia, as Sir Alfred shook hands with her; “and yet she must be a kind of relation of yours.”

“ I was just going to ask you to introduce me,” said Sir Alfred, with a voice which seemed to remind me of some great happiness. “ And I think,” he added, “ we must have met before, though I have tried in vain to remember where.”

The waltz was just beginning, and he led me into the circle without formally asking me to dance.

His waltzing was quite different from that of all the others I had danced with that evening, and it seemed to transport me suddenly into a blissful and unknown world. When, at last, we stopped, he said,

“ Yes, we must have met before, but it must have been in some happier world than this has hitherto been to me. I was certain of it the moment I saw you dancing in the

first quadrille with Lord Woodford. I hope you wondered why I disappeared so suddenly at the end, instead of asking for an introduction to you. Ah ! I am glad to see you did. The fact was, my cousin, with whom I was dancing, was very ill, and wanted to return home as soon as possible, so I ran to get her carriage ; and when at last I succeeded in getting it, my unreasonable aunt begged me to see my poor cousin home in it, as the other sister could not bear to lose the ball. So I sacrificed myself, and did the good-natured thing, and am only just returned, for they live miles off. But I am rewarded for it all by this," he added, as we again whirled, or rather hovered—for we did not seem to touch the ground—round the room, and under the wreaths of fresh roses which

shielded the lights from the dancers' eyes, without diminishing the brilliancy of the illumination.

When the dance was over he took me through the picture-gallery, which I had not yet seen. I had not seen many very good pictures. In the old palaces in the neighbourhood of Sorrento but few of the ancient collections still remained, and my delight at seeing those he particularly pointed out to me was extreme. And the account he gave me of some of them, in the rich tones of his wonderful voice, seemed to open a new world of enchantment to my fascinated gaze. Then he took me into the conservatory, which was filled with the finest and most fragrant flowers I had ever seen.

“Were you ever at Pompeii?” he sud-

denly asked, and at the same moment I remembered that it was there I had seen him. The year before my father died I went there with my aunt. "And did you not sing a Neapolitan barcarolle on the ruins of the theatre? Ah! yes it is the same, and it seems now but yesterday that I heard that thrilling voice, and——"

He suddenly stopped, and turned pale, as if some fearful impression had suddenly awakened, that checked, or half-obliterated, the apparently happy remembrance of our sunny day at Pompeii. The real reason for that change I never ascertained till long, long afterwards, and how often I have bitterly regretted that I did not at the moment ask him what it was. What endless sorrow might then have been spared to us

and many others. But at that moment I was too full of a new kind of joy to take in and comprehend any source of misery. In fact, I looked away from it, and sought to restore his hitherto happy expression by speaking of that day at Pompeii; and I reminded him that he had picked up my hat, which fell off as I had climbed up the ruined wall.

“Yes, indeed, and how delightfully you showed your gratitude by consenting to sing another song; and then how provoked I was at its being interrupted by that old nurse, who began to scold, and to say ‘*e poi*,’ with such fierce looks; and how you ran away, and I saw you join an old lady, who also looked so angry that I did not venture to follow you, lest I should increase your

trouble. And then you drove off," he added, "and I lost all traces of you. But the voice, and your—— Well, how strange that we should meet again after so many years. And of course you sing now? You must have the finest voice I ever heard! You will sing for me to-morrow, will you not? For I am engaged to dine with Lady Horatia Somerton, and I find you are staying with her; and you will sing with me?"

We then talked of the various songs which were in vogue; and he sang a few notes of some duets he wanted me to sing with him, which I had never heard before. We were interrupted at last by Lord Woodford, who exclaimed in his harsh, conceited-sounding voice,

"Ha! I have found you at last! Have

you been hiding here all this time? Lady Horatia Somerton is quite uneasy about Miss Vivian. And she forgot that she was engaged to me for the fourth galop, a good hour ago."

"I am very sorry," said I; while I felt particularly glad to have escaped the dance with him.

"Well, you must make amends by dancing this waltz." And he put out his arm with a kind of familiar confidence which annoyed me, and I said—

"Oh! no, I could not waltz with you now—it is impossible."

He seemed much surprised, and then said,

"Well, then, the next quadrille. And in the meantime I have Lady Horatia's orders

to bring you to her." And he again held out his arm.

But I shrank away, and said with a somewhat haughty air,

"I will return to Lady Horatia, of course, if she wishes to see me." And taking Sir Alfred's arm, we proceeded slowly towards the ball-room, followed by Lord Woodford, who talked to us about the ball, and the company, in his rough bass voice, all the time.

CHAPTER XIII.

LADY HORATIA SOMERTON.

I THOUGHT Lady Horatia Somerton looked rather displeased when we at last succeeded in getting through the crowd, and reached the raised sofa where she sat.

“Have you been dancing together all this time?” she inquired.

“Only one waltz and a quadrille,” said Sir Alfred; “but I have been showing Miss Vivian the pictures.”

“ But I found them in the conservatory,” said Lord Woodford, “ engaged—I may say that I surprised them—in a very interesting *tête-à-tête*, I assure you.”

I felt much annoyed, and could not help blushing, as I feared, by Lady Horatia’s looks of displeasure, that I had been doing something wrong.

“ Well, but you are engaged for the next quadrille to Lord Woodford, are you not?” inquired Lady Horatia; “ and it will soon begin, so you had better go at once, and get a good place, and a *vis-à-vis*.”

I could no longer refuse Lord Woodford’s arm; and as I reluctantly went with him towards the dancers, I was somewhat relieved by seeing Sir Alfred soon follow with

a young lady, and insist on being our *vis-à-vis*. So I enjoyed the dance extremely, for he contrived to look towards me several times. But I saw that Lord Woodford did not seem to like this, and was annoyed because I would not attend much to his trifling talk. At least it seemed to me trifling, because I did not like his manner or tone.

When the dance was over, Lady Horatia said it was time to go home, and she asked Sir Alfred to get her carriage. The irrepressible Lord Woodford again offered his arm to take me down to the cloak-room, while some other young men offered theirs to Lady Horatia. She accepted the assistance of a little man with a turned-up nose, who had danced with me twice, and had

buzzed about me a good deal. I did not know who he was, but, as we drove home, Lady Horatia told me he was the young Marquis of Lorrington, one of the richest men of the day.

“You have made no end of conquests,” she said. “Your success has been even greater than I anticipated. But now I am going to give you a serious piece of advice. I am going to place you as our parents were in the Garden of Eden. You may freely flirt with all the men, who are only too willing to fall in love with you, except one ; and with him,” she added, in a tone partly mocking, but with a great mixture of serious anxiety—“with him thou shalt not flirt, nor allow him to fall in love ; and that is the man you unfortunately mono-

polished so long this evening, Sir Alfred Rivers."

"Why?—is he engaged to be married?" I asked, with a sudden anxiety.

"I cannot explain my reasons; only remember, they are very weighty. I shall be extremely displeased if you do not fulfil my wishes to the letter in this case; nay, more, you will bitterly repent it yourself if you disregard my commands."

Her tone was more serious, and her looks more dark and angry, than I fancied such cheery and sunshiny features could have assumed; so, feeling half frightened and half angry, I said—

"I am sure I don't want any of the gentlemen to like me. I—in fact——" I was going to say, "I am engaged," but the re-

collection of Carlo's supposed indifference made me stop, when it roused still more my proud and rebellious feelings.

"But they do, and will care for you," said Lady Horatia, in her usual pleasant tone. "There are two great *partis* at your feet already. You may be Lady Woodford, with a fine castle and park in Wales, and twelve thousand a year; or the Marchioness of Lorrington, with thirty thousand a year. Yes, I have asked Lorrington to dinner to-morrow, for he would suit you best. He is a good little man, and if you managed him well, he would make a very fair husband."

"But I should not like to marry either of them," I said; "and besides, they cannot possibly care for me."

“Perhaps not for you, but for the reigning beauty of the season they will. I mean, they do not understand you so well as I do. I was prepared for your not caring much about rank or fortune, if you could but love the person who offers it. Still you like luxury and splendour, and you may get to like that young Marquis.”

“Impossible !”

“Well, we shall see ; only remember my orders about Sir Alfred. I am sorry he is coming also to dinner to-morrow, but it can't be helped now. I could not foresee that he would take such——”

“We met before, when I was a little girl at Pompeii,” I said, as if to excuse him in her eyes, “and he liked my singing some Neapolitan barcarolle.”

“ Ah, yes ; you have a splendid voice too, of course you have, and he is the best tenor of the day.”

She was silent during the rest of the drive home, and looked thoughtful and not well pleased.

“ What can it be ?” I thought. “ Can she care for him herself, or has she a bad opinion of him ?”

This mysterious prohibition made me think still more of him, and in the rebellious frame I was in rather seemed to stimulate my spirit of contradiction. Then I determined to be cautious, and not appear to be ungrateful for all her kindness to me, by apparently going against her wishes.

Had she but known me better still, and

confided the whole truth about Sir Alfred, what years of trouble and misery and remorse might have been spared! This was the great turning-point of my life.

“I should not fall in love—no, of course not. I would never care for anyone again ; it would be impossible.” Still my last thoughts, as I went to sleep that night, were of Sir Alfred ; and his looks, the tone of his voice, haunted my dreams all night with a wild, intoxicating kind of delight.

But the next morning I got up with a feeling of disenchantment and depression. The cold light of a cloudy morning, that penetrated the dingy blinds, seemed to awaken me to the realities of life, and my peculiar position in it. The transient gleam

of wild bliss I had enjoyed the night before was exchanged for a dreary feeling of disbelief in all happiness.

CHAPTER XIV.

FASCINATION.

MRS. MORDAUNT very kindly came, into my room, while I was dressing, to know how I had enjoyed my first ball. I did not seem to be able to tell her anything about it, except that the room was beautiful, and that I danced a great deal.

“And you had pleasant partners?”

“Only one,” I was going to say, but checked myself when I remembered Lady Horatia’s solemn commands. “Yes, pretty

well; everybody was very kind to me, and the Duke himself was most attentive."

"Ah, well, you are a lucky girl to be thus launched forth in the best society. Lady Horatia will not come down to breakfast, and Mr. Mordaunt and I had ours with little Miss Somerton and her governess, and Lady Horatia thought you would like to have yours up here; and there is a letter for you—I think from Aunt Jane."

The letter I had long been anxiously expecting! Yet somehow, now that I held it in my hand, I felt that whatever she said would not be of much use; in fact, I half dreaded the good influence she had exerted over me, and I was not impatient to read it. So I finished dressing very leisurely, and satisfied dear, good Mrs. Mordaunt's curiosity as far

as I could about the details of the ball and my partners.

“And was not our nephew, Sir Alfred Rivers there?” she inquired, for I had purposely avoided his name.

“Yes, and I danced with him twice, I believe,” said I, with well-assumed indifference.

“And I find he is to dine here to-day,” I added, as I put the finishing stroke to the braids of my hair. I longed to ask her whether he was engaged to be married, or what Lady Horatia could have meant, but I shrank from saying anything that would betray the strange interest I felt about him. I remembered hearing Mr. Mordaunt complain that his nephew was wild, and gambled, and that all the women in London were making up to him ; but in my present per-

verse state of mind all this, even the vice of gambling, seemed to increase his fascination.

After breakfast I remembered that I had not yet read Aunt Jane's letter, and wondered, with a kind of startled self-reproach, at the change which had come over me in the last six weeks, since I wrote to her. When I had sent that letter to her I felt as if she were the only person in the world who could help me, and as if all my future life would depend upon the advice her answer would contain.

Just as I was beginning to read it, the little Brownie came skipping into my room, to see I had my breakfast all right ; and she brought a roll of music in her hand, which she told me was sent her by Sir Alfred, for me to look over.

“And he sent a message to me,” she added, with an arch smile, “to beg that I would make you try them over. So come down to the piano directly; there will be no one in the drawing-room for the next two hours.” And she took hold of my hand and led me downstairs.

They were the duets and songs he had mentioned the night before, “*Amor posente nomi*,” in *Armida*, and one in *Zoraide*, in which the words he warbled in the conservatory began,

“Ah, nati e ver noi siamo sol per amarci ognor.”

Now these words, and the tones of his splendid voice, still sounded in my ears, and filled me with a kind of wild, intoxicating joy. I sang over my parts in a

kind of ecstasy of delight, while the little Brownie stood on a chair, leaning over the end of the piano, and gazing in my face with evidently wondering admiration.

“Oh! go on; it is better than anything at the Opera!” she said, when I came to the solo of Armida’s part.

She was a very odd and original child, and so susceptible of impressions produced by the sentiments uttered in music, that she kept up a kind of graceful action all the time, clasping her hand with an imploring look at the pathetic parts, and raising them in wild triumph at the exulting, joyful passages; then, at some plaintive phrases, the tears ran down her little cheeks.

“I must come down to hear you sing them with Sir Alfred,” she said. “I shall be very

good all day, then Madame Perier will let me steal down into the next room, where nobody will see me."

"But I am not at all sure of singing them with him," I said. "On the contrary, I am sure I shall not."

"Why?" she inquired, while her large eyes looked wonderingly into mine with an expression that made me think that I was annoyed at the idea of not singing with him. But with the fine tact I afterwards found she possessed, she made no observation, except to take my hand in both hers, and raise it to her lips, with a kind of winning gentleness and reverence which was very charming. "I must go and do my lessons now, but you will sing to me again to-morrow if—if I don't hear you to-night? Mamma will

be down soon," she added, as she ran out of the room.

I hastily gathered up the music when I heard this, as I did not want her to see that I had been practising Sir Alfred's songs, and took them upstairs to my room. In fact, I almost shrank from seeing her, from feeling conscious of the longing I had to sing them with him, and to disobey her mysterious commands.

I then remembered Aunt Jane's letter; and having no further excuse for delay, I sat down deliberately to read it. Such a letter! Years afterwards the words dwelt in my mind; and at times of my greatest perversity and error, they haunted me with a warning like the writing on the wall of Babylon, that would not be hidden from my

eyes—the kind advice, the warning against the very same rebellious frame of mind into which I now felt conscious I had fallen ! I read it through, gasping, with a feeling of horror at myself, half wishing that I had not read it.

Aunt Jane seemed to foresee so plainly my exact position and particular temptations. Yet she could not have known that I was coming to Lady Horatia's, or that I should have met such a person as Sir Alfred.

CHAPTER XV.

A PLEASANT DINNER-PARTY.

LADY HORATIA most kindly superintended my toilette for the dinner-party that day, and made me wear one of my own simple muslin dresses, which had been a little altered by Madame Rosalie ; and she placed a spray of white stephanotis in my hair, which she gathered from their own conservatory.

The little Marquis of Lorrington was the

first to arrive ; and then a fat, large man, who, I heard, was the greatest wit of the day. After that, a short, interesting-looking pale one (who was said to be a celebrated poet), and a little old lady, who seemed very short-sighted, but had a most pleasing expression and tone of voice. She was reckoned the most agreeable woman in London.

Lord Lorrington had sat down by me when he came, and began to talk very quickly, and to tell me about the others as they came in ; but I was glad when the pale poet came and seated himself on the other side of me, with an arch look, as if he intended to monopolize my attention.

“I always choose to sit by the youngest and prettiest of the party,” he said. And then he

talked very agreeably, in a slow and pleasant, though somewhat nasal voice. Although he spoke chiefly to me, he did not exclude Lord Lorrington—on the contrary, it seemed to me as if he wished to draw out whatever of good or agreeable there might be found in the young Marquis, who evidently had sufficient humility to look up to the old poet with much respect, although he did not seem to like the interruption to our *tête-à-tête* at first.

Another lady and gentleman arrived after we had talked for some little time; and it was now so late that I began to fear that Sir Alfred would not come. Could Lady Horatia have put him off? I was confirmed in this apprehension by seeing her ring the bell and order dinner; and my disappoint-

ment must have been shown in my face, for the old poet whispered in my ear,

“Ah ! you were expecting somebody else, who has not come.”

At that moment dinner was announced, and Lady Horatia, after sending the other guests down, took Lord Lorrington's arm, and the poet offered his to me.

“I am lucky,” he said, “but I would not have given you up even if the right person had arrived. But, my dear child, take an old man's advice, and unless *he*, the right one, is very, very good, don't throw away your chance of that young Marquis ; there is more good in him than you think of. I wish he may find a nice, pretty wife soon ; and I think—I think, if you could love him as he deserves—I'm not sure, though. You

have a fine nature, but something has gone wrong with you. Is it the loss of your property? That was certainly a great trial. Ah! we are to go to the top. Lady Horatia wants you to sit near the Marquis, I see."

So I found myself between them again, and just after we sat down I saw Sir Alfred come into the room. He went up to Lady Horatia and apologised for being so late, then shook hands with me, or rather pressed my hand with a soft, lingering touch which made me blush with delight, and went to take the only vacant place at the farther end of the table. I believe that neither of my neighbours had seen me blush, but I saw that Lady Horatia's quick eyes perceived it; so I began to talk very volubly to Lord Lorrington, for I was much afraid

of the poet's quickness of perception ; but a little time afterwards, the poet said to me—

“ Yes, he is very handsome, and has some genius ; but, my dear young lady, pray don't fall in love with him.”

“ With whom ?” I inquired, as innocently as I could, as I felt that my cheek was getting most provokingly red.

“ You know whom I mean, I see ; but I hope he's not the one you expected, because you must not think of him.”

How very strange this second warning seemed ! What could he know ?

“ Why?—is it because he plays ?” I asked.

“ There are many reasons,” he said, with a solemn voice. “ Take my advice, don't dream of him—don't be foolish—it would never do.”

I was afraid Lady Horatia would hear us, so I began to talk of other things; and as I soon saw that Sir Alfred was looking at me with that wonderfully fascinating expression, I enjoyed the party very much.

The celebrated wit sat on Lady Horatia's left side, and so we came in for a good many of his jokes; and there was something in the manner of telling them, and his broad, genial face, that made everything he said most amusing.

Many of his sayings were repeated all along the table, and reached Sir Alfred, who responded with some witty or clever remark, which showed him to me in a different and still more attractive point of view than before.

“No wonder that everybody raves about

him, and his voice too," thought I, with a thrill of delight at the idea of singing with him. My face must have expressed my thoughts much more than was expedient, for the pale poet said at that moment,

"You will enjoy singing with him to-night. I am afraid even more than I shall to hear you both, and that will be very much, for to hear good music is one of the greatest pleasures of my life."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE FATAL SPELL.

LADY HORATIA then made the move for the ladies to go upstairs, and when we reached the drawing-room I found myself near the little, short-sighted old lady, Lady Charlotte Crofton, who began talking very kindly to me, and asked particularly what kind of person my cousin was, whose unexpected existence had deprived me of my inheritance.

I could tell her nothing at all about him, for no one with whom I was acquainted had yet seen him, except my guardian.

“That is very strange,” she said; “I should have thought his first object would have been to see you, and express the regret he ought to feel at depriving you of your property. He cannot be like his father, for I well remember he was the best-bred as well as the handsomest man I ever saw.”

“Ah, that fatal passion for gambling!” she added, after a pause; and then she seemed to be scanning me very minutely. “That fatal vice! my dear young lady, remember, whatever you do, don’t marry a gambler. They are often so fatally fascinating; and I often think that the handsome baronet who dines here will have the same fate as

your poor uncle ; for, you know, he ruined himself, and diminished by three-fourths your grandfather's splendid property."

"Do you mean Sir Alfred Rivers?" I inquired, while I tried to look as composed and indifferent as possible.

"Yes, he has already lost very large sums, and a few evenings ago—" she was interrupted by the arrival of some guests, who were so delighted to find her that they diverted her attention till the gentlemen came up.

The first to enter the room was Sir Alfred, and I was the first person he addressed. He asked me more with eyes than speech whether I had tried the music. I mean that the expression of his eyes, and the tone of his voice, said more than his words. He

seemed to cast a spell over me, and in spite of Lady Horatia's and other warnings. I seemed drawn with him, by some magic power, to the farther end of the next room, where the piano was.

• Then he looked over the music, talking of many other things too, till Lord Lorrington came, who said Lady Horatia sent him to beg that Sir Alfred would sing a solo. Then he sang that song of Rubini's, "*Nel furor delle tempeste*," which I had never heard before; and I was so entranced by his voice that I quite shrank from singing even with him, lest it should spoil my enjoyment of listening; so he sang "*Vivitu*," while the room gradually became quite full, for there was an evening party, and

every one was anxious to hear the best amateur of the day.

“Now will you sing ‘Amor posente nome,’ with me?—or shall I come to-morrow morning, and we will have a delightful rehearsal of all these?”

He said this very low, and evidently did not wish that anyone should hear him.

“To-morrow,” I said, when a joyous blush most provokingly tinged my cheeks, and made me feel quite guilty. But it was evident that I must sing that night, for the good-natured little blundering Lord Lorrington asked Lady Horatia to make me sing; and he even pointed out the duet Sir Alfred held in his hand, and said that he particularly wished us to sing that—his great favourite. Lady Horatia seemed annoyed, but

still she begged I would sing it, if I thought I knew it sufficiently, adding "that it was a great risk to sing it at sight before a large audience."

"You can sing it, I am sure," said Sir Alfred; and added, in the same whisper, "you are the only person in the whole world I would risk singing it with in public without a rehearsal. But you will do it splendidly," he added, with a look of such encouraging admiration, that I felt quite re-assured.

He played the accompaniment, and I suppose it went well, for the applause at the end was most enthusiastic, and even Lady Horatia complimented me on my wonderful success, and Lord Lorrington said the public were indebted to him for their pleasure, as he had made me sing it.

“Ah ! now we must have this one,” he added, as he placed “Ah, nati e ver” on the piano desk. This went even better, I believe, and I felt more confident, and gave a fuller meaning to the words. And the applause that was given, the clapping of hands, the rush of people who wished to be introduced to me, was quite bewildering.

“She is *not* a professor,” I heard Lady Horatia telling some of the people who had come after dinner. “She is not the new opera-singer,” she said, in rather an angry tone ; and then she whispered to me, “You ought *not* to have sung ; you ought to have known that I could not help asking you when Lord Lorrington pressed it. Well, never mind now, but this must never happen again.”

The pale poet, too, came up to me with a look of half reproach and half admiration, and said,

“Such music as that covers a multitude of sins. It makes me forgive even your disobedience; but beware,” he added, in a lower tone, “you are like a moth singeing its wings in that brilliant light, and will not leave it till you are burnt to death. Here comes our friend the great wit, Mr. Baynard, to congratulate you on the end of your singing. Look, he is bursting with suppressed conversation; his brilliant flash of silence has lasted so long!”

Then people began to talk, and a large group surrounded the wit, Mr. Baynard; but the person with whom he chiefly conversed was Lady Charlotte Crofton, the little short-

sighted lady, who had raised her warning voice to me before the music began. Sir Alfred remained near me, and told me who the different people were, but he also joined in the general conversation. It seemed as if he did not wish others to perceive the marked attention which I felt he was showing me.

Lord Lorrington was also near, and though I saw he admired me, did not seem to be jealous of Sir Alfred, which confirmed me in the opinion the poet had expressed of his amiability. But Sir Alfred was not equally tolerant or amiable, which was very delightful. Indeed, he said, in a low voice,

“It’s no use my staying here now, I shall have no more conversation with you ; but

may I come to-morrow morning, and have a rehearsal of those other duets?"

"I—no—I think not. Lady Horatia—"

"I understand. She has cautioned you against me. I thought it would be so," he added, with a most touching, melancholy tone and look. "I see I must not come; but, of course, I shall meet you at Lady Dalton's ball to-morrow night?"

"I believe so."

He said no more, but gave me a look which seemed to express a whole world of hope and bliss, and then went away.

It was a great joy to have received that look; but why did he go so suddenly, and before any of the company went? The old poet, Mr. —, whom I had not seen since the end of the singing, came up to me at

that moment, and, as if he knew my thoughts, said,

“ Ah, he is gone to Crockford’s, my dear young lady. You see that even your beauty and attraction cannot keep him away from that fatal gambling.”

“ He said there was no use in staying now, because he should have no more conversation with me,” I replied, with a kind of proud eagerness to defend Sir Alfred.

“ Oh, it has gone so far as that, has it ?” and he raised his pale thin hand with a gesture of disapproval. “ You *will* be the moth, and you *will* burn yourself to death.”

He then began to talk to Mr. Mordaunt, who had just come back from his club, where he had been dining, to avoid the “ stiff dinner,” as he called it, and was now very

angry at finding the rooms full of people, as he did not know that an evening party was expected.

The old poet was amused at his crossness, and rather increased it by asking him about Langdale Priory and its new owner, and expressing great surprise that Mr. Mordaunt had not yet seen my new cousin.

“ You ought to go there, my good friend,” he said ; “ go and see with your own eyes what kind of youth it is. And never mind intruding—you ought to intrude in such a case. Why can’t you make the excuse that you have left something behind in some drawer—some important paper, or a favourite old pair of boots. Go there at once ;” and then he said something in a lower tone, of which the only word that reached

my ears were "those scoundrel Jews."

"Ha, then I will go," exclaimed Mr. Mordaunt, with loud anger ; "confound the boy !"

"Hush ! there's Mr. Baynard, he will think you are some wild animal of an original ; he's always on the look-out for characters, and you are not acquainted with him, I think."

"Yes, I will go there indeed, by the first train to-morrow—this morning," said Mr. Mordaunt, as he looked at the clock, which showed it was nearly one. "I will, for by —, it will be too bad if the girl is ousted out of her home for a confounded spendthrift."

"Not so loud, my good friend, you will attract everybody's attention, for I see you are a man of one idea, and I have fatally set

you going, and can't make you discreet and cautious."

"Ah, young lady, be discreet and cautious."

"I'll do nothing in a hurry," said Mr. Mordaunt, while he gave the lie to his own words by leaving the room in such violent haste that he nearly knocked down several people on his way to the door.

I could not help feeling glad that the dear old poet had stirred up Mr. Mordaunt's energies.

"That worthy man," continued he, "can do nothing unless his anger is excited, I know, but I wish he had spared Mrs. Lawrence's wig. See, he has actually contrived to turn it awry, and the poor lady is making violent efforts to put it right; can't you get

quietly behind her and help to set it right without appearing to do so, for the stupid dandies are laughing at her, as if they never expected to grow old themselves."

Guided by him, I endeavoured to move quietly near the poor lady, but she was leaving the room as we approached, in despair probably of being able to put her wig and head-dress to rights. We followed her into the next room, which was less crowded; and the poet, without seeming to know that anything had happened, quietly introduced me, and then I offered to settle a feather in her hair which I said was displaced. I contrived to turn the wig round in so doing, and put all her headgear to rights, and she expressed her grateful thanks.

"You must come and see my grand-

children next Friday—we are going to have a juvenile ball ; and Lady Horatia has promised to bring her little Letitia. I did not intend to have any grown-up young ladies, but I shall like to have you. And they are going to make up a little concert. Indeed, Sir Alfred Rivers is so kind as to superintend it. By-the-by, were you the young lady who had just been singing with him when I came in ?”

“ Yes, she was,” said the poet ; “ but I don’t advise you to make her sing on Friday, for she is worse than a professor, and will totally eclipse all your young ones.”

“ Ah ! that would be a pity,” said this matter-of-fact old lady.

“ Now, mind you don’t, though,” said he, after she was gone. “ And it would show

very bad taste and feeling if you do ; and I am sure Lady Horatia will not like it."

"Of course I will not," said I, somewhat nettled at the idea, and provoked that everything and everybody seemed to combine to prevent us from singing together.

CHAPTER XVII.

A DISAGREEABLE INTERRUPTION.

MR. MORDAUNT fulfilled his intention of starting quite early the next morning for Langdale Priory, intending to sleep at the inn in the nearest town, and return on the following day.

Lady Horatia never came down before luncheon, so I made use of the piano in the drawing-room, under the guidance of the

little Brownie. In the middle of one of my songs, in which the little girl kept up a kind of acting accompaniment, the door opened, and, to my dismay, Mr. Henry Mordaunt was announced. I had hoped never to see him again, and wondered how he could venture to seek me out in this manner. I therefore took it for granted that he wished to see Mrs. Mordaunt, and I said I would go and find her. I hastily left the room. Could the man be really in love with me that he thus persevered, now that I had lost my property, I thought. I then wished that Lady Horatia had been made acquainted with his insolent proposal, for I dreaded lest she might good-naturedly ask him to dinner, or to some party. So I whispered to Brownie that I should like, if

possible, to have a few words with her mother.

“You don’t like that man, I see,” said the shrewd child; “and I hate him, because he interrupted our song, and made you look angry and unhappy; and I am sure mamma won’t like him. She never does like people who look so pretentious and disagreeable as that man does. She will not ask him, I am certain.”

“I hope not. And that is just what I want—to try and prevent her. He is related to us, and I am afraid she might.”

We were now at the top of the stairs, and Brownie opened Lady Horatia’s door, and I heard her say that I wished to speak to her.

“You won’t want me, I know—she has

got something very particular to say, I see by her anxious face, so I'll go and finish my lessons."

Yes, I had something very particular to say; and, impelled by the kind sympathy of her face, I told her of the persecution to which my guardian had always subjected me, and of his infamous offer to keep the matter secret and allow me to retain possession of my property, if I would consent to marry him. I also told her of the still greater horror I had experienced at his surmise that the world would blame my father, and imagine that he had suppressed the fact of his elder brother's marriage after becoming acquainted with it.

"Impossible!—he was too well known for that," said Lady Horatia, indignantly;

and then added, while she kissed me tenderly—"My poor child, you have indeed suffered, and I do not now wonder at your being in an excited and perhaps somewhat perverse state. You must think no more about all this, but try to enjoy yourself and your triumphs. And now I must see about your dress for to-night. I want you to be more beautiful than ever, for you will meet a rival beauty to-night—a marvellous beauty, and, strange to say, also a half Italian—the Countess Rossi."

"Oh! I have heard of her; and, indeed, she is related to my mother; and I have also heard of the mysterious disappearance of her husband's intended wife, Dorina, the very night before the marriage was to have taken place. So she has come to London?"

“Yes; she was presented at Court last week—for she has succeeded to a fine old place and property, Castle Hill—and the sensation she created at the Drawing-room was most astonishing. Never was anything like it since the last century, and the days of the Gunnings. People were breathless with admiration, and quite mobbed her.”

“Yes, she is partly Italian; she is related distantly to”—Carlo, I was going to say, but checked myself; “but she is more German, and, from what I hear, she must be a most dreadful person.”

“I can quite imagine that: there is something quite diabolical in her splendid eyes; she gave me the idea of an evil spirit in the form of an angel of light—yes, light as well

as beauty; for there was something so strangely dazzling about her—the quick play of expression, the most brilliant complexion and colouring I ever saw, a hue of indescribable shiningness all over her, a Venus de' Medici kind of figure—she reminded me of those quaint lines of Herbert's—

‘ O Rose, whose hue, angry and brave,
Makes the rash gazer wipe his eye,
Thy root is ever in its grave,
And thou must die.’ ”

I felt much curiosity to see her, and yet a kind of vague dread, for Lady Horatia's description exactly tallied with what I had heard; and, in fact, it had been whispered that she made away with her cousin and rival by causing her to fall into some deep

chasm in the Hohenstein caves ; but I would not repeat this to Lady Horatia, as I would never believe that it could possibly be true.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RIVAL BEAUTIES.

THE ball at Lady Dalton's that evening was of a more mixed kind than the Duke of D——'s. I saw several people making up violently to Lady Horatia, who reminded me in their speech and manner of Mrs. Chandos.

The little Marquis and Lord Woodford were both standing at the top of the stairs when we were announced, and both claimed me for the first dance.

“Rank must have precedence,” said Lady Horatia, smiling at my embarrassment as to which I was to accept. So Lord Lorrington led me into the ball-room, when I had promised the next waltz to the other, although he was such a bad waltzer, I dreaded the display. But there was no help for it, as I could not discover Sir Alfred anywhere.

In the middle of our quadrille, we saw a great movement of the crowd at the further end of the long ball-room, and everyone looked with great curiosity to see what occasioned it. Soon the dense mass was divided, and fell back, as Lord Lorrington said, like the walls of the Red Sea; and in the clear space between we saw a dazzling apparition—a shining, fairy-like form lean-

ing on—oh ! horror, then I saw it—it must be the Countess Rossi, and the man is—Sir Alfred!

They were followed by another pair, and the four took their places in our quadrille. A dense crowd now surrounded us. People stood on chairs, while others pressed so near that, had there been no partition-ropes, we should have had no room to stir.

She, or rather it, I was going to say, for there was something so dazzlingly unreal about her—she was very small, and dressed in something indescribably glittering—whether it was covered with diamonds, or gold and silver tissue, I know not—and her movements were so quick, and her step so light, that she seemed to be hovering in the air, like a butterfly darting about near a flower.

Sir Alfred nodded to me, and half shrugged his shoulders, as if he meant to express regret that he was not dancing with me ; but I think she perceived the gesture, slight as it was, for she instantly asked him some question, and contrived totally to absorb his attention during the remainder of the dance.

But she looked at me several times, though I felt that she prevented him from looking in my direction, and asked him about people on the farthest side from where I was. She is mesmerising him, I thought, with a feeling of vague dread, and I looked round on my partner, to see what effect her beauty had on him. He had seen her before, and, in reply to my question, said,

“Yes, I suppose she is splendid and beautiful, but I don’t think her lovely. I could never have loved her.”

“Why?”

“I can scarcely tell, except that she frightens me. Yet what a little thing it is!”

“She will make you love her,” I thought, as I saw that she intended to be introduced to Lord Lorrington, now that the quadrille was over.

I was right, for Sir Alfred came, as if to shake hands with me, and he presented his dazzling partner to the Marquis, and of course he asked her to dance the next waltz. She also spoke to me, and said that she was glad to meet a relation of whom she had often heard.

“And you will waltz with me?” said Sir

Alfred, in his soft, and, I felt, still loving voice.

But Lord Woodford came up to remind me of my engagement to him, whom I believe I should entirely have forgotten or ignored, had he not.

“Then the one after,” said Sir Alfred, who did not dance that waltz. He stood looking on at the dancers, and I felt dreadfully annoyed at having such a bad partner, that spoilt my dancing; while the Countess managed, with a kind of magic power, to spin the little Marquis round so that he, as well as herself, seemed scarcely to touch the ground.

Lord Woodford urged me to dance the following quadrille with him, after our blundering waltz was over; and, in order to

see what was going on, and to fill up the time, I accepted him.

The Countess danced in our quadrille with a foreign prince, who seemed to be a most devoted admirer; and Lord Woodford pointed out to me a tall, pale man, who stood near, as Count Rossi. Such a look of misery, or rather such a total indifference to all around, as his handsome face expressed, I never before witnessed.

“He is broken-hearted, they all say, and even this great property they have lately inherited fails to rouse him from that sad state of apathy.”

Sir Alfred afterwards gave me, during our waltz, more details of the tragic end of Dorina, the Count's first intended wife. He also told me that he had the worst possible

opinion of this wonderful Cunigunda, Countess of Rossi, and pleased me by expressing his certainty that she made away with her rival. "She is capable of any wickedness," he added.

"And yet you seemed to admire her?"

"As one admires a wondrous piece of acting, or the beautiful picture of an evil spirit, or as one is fascinated by some fatal vice," he said, in a sad tone.

"Is play so very fascinating?" I inquired.

"People told me last night that you left Lady Horatia's to indulge in your favourite vice."

"I think you could cure me of it."

There was a pause, and I waited in breathless anxiety, thinking he was going to say more; but he looked so absent, as if

he almost forgot what he was saying, and then made some observation about a young lady's dress who was opposite to us.

“Could not that magic beauty, the fascinating fairy, cure you of it as well?”

“Cure me of what? Now another turn,” and as we whirled round, his eyes expressed far more than his words had yet done; and I began to think that some fatal engagement, or other mysterious cause, really would prove the barrier about which Lady Horatia and all the others had hinted. He danced twice afterwards with me, and, in spite of his bad opinion of her, twice also with the Countess that night; but with no one else.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DREAM.

LADY HORATIA did not afterwards express any disapprobation at my dancing with him so often ; though the day after the Duke of ——'s, she had said it was quite wrong to dance twice with the same person. She told me that Sir Alfred was what everybody considered too fine to dance with any one but the most decided beauty of the season ; and she was therefore glad

that no one could say the Countess had cut me out.

“Then it was not such a great honour to be danced with by the Marquis or Duke as with Sir Alfred?”

“No ; because he is the most fashionable man in London. He carries everything before him.”

“And he said that I could cure him of his passion for play,” I thought with delight.

Lady Horatia was not introduced to the beautiful Countess, although I saw the sprightly fairy wished to make her acquaintance. I think she asked Sir Alfred to introduce her ; and I found afterwards that Lady Horatia had civilly prevented him, and several people, from doing so.

“I will not know her if I can help it,”

said Lady Horatia, as we drove home ; “ and I advised the Duke of D—— not to invite her to his ball—your first ball. She is a powerful little creature, and I daresay will make her way in spite of me ; and of course she will never forgive me for keeping her out of D—— House, which exclusion shuts the doors of many others to her ; and I am more glad than ever that I did so, for I saw to-night what a mischievous creature she must be. How I pity that most interesting husband of hers, who is too unhappy and indifferent to be jealous of her. I suppose she will never like to live at that beautiful old place, Castle Hill ? Yet it is a spot which ought to revive the most depressed or broken-hearted—such views over the extensive park ; and the house the most per-

fect specimen of the Tudor and Elizabethan architecture in England, having the remains of an old castle joined on to it, with secret passages and mysterious trap-doors, and priests' hiding-holes—every kind of romantic association ; for it illustrates the history of the times almost from the Conquest down to the last century.”

“ How I should like to see it ! ”

“ Perhaps you will some day, for it is only ten miles from my old friend's the Duchess of Dromoland, and she will tell you of all the romantic stories attached to it, and of the beautiful ghost which is said to appear once in every century—a lady of King Edward the Third's time, who was built up in the wall by a jealous husband. Count Rossi, as well as his present wife, is a descendant

of hers, and I fancied his handsome and most melancholy face very like the picture I saw at Castle Hill of the lovely ghost, Lady Jane."

"And was his first intended wife descended from that old family?—for she was his first cousin, I fancy."

"Yes, and by an elder branch, for she had the first claim, and was heiress to all that property, and her cousin Cunigunda, Count Rossi's present wife, has succeeded as next of kin. Their grandmother was a Roland, and the beautiful Dorina was daughter of her eldest son. I learnt all this from Lady Charlotte Crofton : she always knows everybody's history, and is very good-natured, yet she too has a very bad opinion of that wondrous Countess."

So had I, and her mischievous eyes, which seemed to have never ceased looking at me all the evening, haunted me still with a strange mixture of dread and horror.

In fact, the recollection of all she did and looked then, seemed to absorb my mind to the exclusion even of Sir Alfred ; and when, at last, I went to sleep, I had a most painfully vivid dream about her. Sir Alfred was singing "*Amor possente nome*" with me, and I thought she came and, with icy touch, drove me away, while Sir Alfred totally disappeared ; and I saw Carlo rise out of a kind of glowing fiery furnace, and gaze at me with reproachful eyes. Then the Countess covered me with a kind of flaming veil, through which I dimly saw him sink-

ing down into a yawning abyss of raging fire, while her still icy fingers seemed to press my throat till I became unconscious.

At last I woke, with a feeling of indescribable horror, and with the full conviction that she was the cause of Carlo's apparent coldness ; and a new feeling of bitter self-reproach at my desertion of him gained firm possession of me.

Could he have fallen under her fatal spell? In one of his letters he said he was going to Venice ; and now I remembered that Count Rossi has an old place there. Could that be the reason of his silence, and the apparent coldness of his last letter? Poor Carlo ! could I ever love him again as I did before? Did he ever excite the wild kind

of entrancing joy that the presence of Sir Alfred gave me?

I was obliged to confess that he had not. Then why should I resent his desertion in the perverse manner I had done? Sir Alfred I was forbidden to care for; even his own words that evening—his absent manner, after saying that I could cure him—everything seemed to warn me that I must not.

Was there ever such a strange fate as mine; and why did he fascinate me? why did the very idea of him fill me with such intense delight? So absorbed was I in these deep questionings that hours passed after I woke, and I never stirred till I heard some one knocking at the door. It was twelve o'clock. Ashamed of my apparent laziness,

I hurried up, though still bewildered with the startling surmises and self-reproach the strange dream had caused.

CHAPTER XX.

THE PROPOSAL.

IT was now the height of the season, and every night, and all day long, there were parties to which Lady Horatia took me. The pale poet gave the most delightful breakfasts, where we met all the wits and other celebrities. We met Sir Alfred, and my two admirers, as Lady Horatia called the little Marquis and Lord Woodford, everywhere, and the beautiful Coun-

tess Rossi much oftener than I liked. Still, Lady Horatia contrived most cleverly to avoid an introduction, although the Countess, being a distant relation of mine, spoke, of course, to me sometimes, although in a somewhat haughty and contemptuous manner. The poet even relented, and she succeeded in appearing at one of his most *recherché* breakfasts; and the excuses he gave were that the Count, who was a great admirer of pictures, had expressed a wish to see those at his house. Although I had the greatest horror of her, I could not help being glad when she was at the parties to which we went, because I saw that Lady Horatia was much more tolerant of Sir Alfred's attention to me; in fact, she could not help enjoying the triumph of my suc-

cess, and I saw that it blinded her to the dangers she had hitherto apprehended.

Sir Alfred made good use of the opportunities of talking to me, and I became daily more completely dazzled and fascinated by him.

Mr. Mordaunt did not return from Langdale Priory, but wrote to beg that Mrs. Mordaunt would join him in that neighbourhood, as he was staying with some old friends; and he hinted in his letter that he wished to remain a little longer, for various reasons. To our great disappointment he said nothing about my new cousin, so we supposed that he had not seen him.

As the house they had taken in London was not quite ready, Mrs. Mordaunt was glad to join her husband at their old friend's;

for, as she never went out at all in London society, she became rather tired of being alone every evening, and most part of the day.

But Lady Horatia would not hear of my leaving her ; and, in fact, I was now very glad to remain, for besides having become better known in the world in general, I could not bear the idea of losing the opportunity of meeting Sir Alfred. Lady Horatia spared no pains to induce me to look favourably on the young Marquis, for she was most anxious to make up the match, and I am afraid that I often appeared more glad to see him than I felt, in order to blind her to my love for the man to whom she objected. In fact, I was always acting a part, and I knew that Sir Alfred was well

aware of it, for he rather encouraged me to treat him with apparent coldness when Lady Horatia's sharp eyes were watching us. That he loved me I felt convinced, and several times he seemed on the point of proposing; and then he appeared to put a force on his feelings, and most mysteriously checked the half-pronounced words.

One night, towards the end of the season, Lady Horatia was not very well, and she sent me to a great ball at L—— House with Lady Charlotte Crofton. Whether it was that this was the first time he had seen me without Lady Horatia, that this threw him off his guard, or because the season was drawing to a close, and we might not meet often again—the words were said, my foolish dreams were realized, and I felt that life

henceforth would be for me an uninterrupted course of bliss.

I was wildly joyous. I imagined that I had never before known what real happiness was ; but long afterwards I perceived that the wild delight caused by the conviction of his love was not the pure happiness I had enjoyed when, under the salutary influence of my father's memory, I spent those blissful months in his old home with Aunt Jane.

However, at that brilliant ball I was perfectly satisfied as we went into the conservatory after the enchanting waltz during which the words were spoken. I could imagine no happiness so great as mine. The Countess Rossi was there that night, and she had been dancing that same waltz

with a handsome foreign prince. I saw that her malicious eyes were on me when Sir Alfred had spoken, and that she perceived by my irrepressible joy that he was accepted.

I was too happy to be depressed by the malignity of her look, but as we were going away, and when Sir Alfred went to call the carriage, she flitted past me, and putting her mouth close to my ear, whispered into it with a serpent-like hiss—

“Hai dimenticato l’amato Carlo?”

I was so startled and bewildered, that for the moment I lost my presence of mind, and when I recovered my senses, and looked for her, she was gone.

Then she did know him—poor Carlo!—and he had no doubt been fascinated by

her wondrous beauty. The sudden vivid recollection of him which her words had called forth, as if by some magic power, made me turn pale, and a feeling of horror and dread seemed to paralyse me.

When Sir Alfred returned, to say the carriage was ready, he was quite frightened at my paleness.

“Whatever has happened?” he said—
“you look as if you had seen a ghost.”

“So I have, I believe,” I said, scarcely knowing what I was doing, for I felt as if Carlo might suddenly appear at any moment, and reproach me for my desertion—in fact, I felt as if Cunigunda’s mysterious power would separate me from the man I now adored, and all I could say was to implore him to come the next morning, for I

could scarcely believe in my happiness.

“Yes, at two o’clock I will come,” he whispered, as he contrived to press my hand to his lips while at the door of the carriage.

Lady Charlotte chatted away as we drove home, but I was so completely absorbed by the exciting and bewildering occurrences of the night, that I believe I neither heard nor spoke a word. I had not been well for several days, and the intoxicating joy of a fulfilment of my wildest, most sanguine hopes, and then the fact of their being dashed to the ground by the strange words of that malignant fairy, seemed to have had a most strange and bewildering effect. My head seemed on fire, and Lady Horatia’s maid, who had most kindly sat up for me

till my return, was quite frightened when she saw me.

“Mademoiselle ought not to have gone to that ball. I told milady so ; you had your head *échauffé*, and now you have got *la fièvre*. I shall make a little *tisane* for Mademoiselle.”

But the *tisane* had no effect ; my head became worse ; I could not sleep, and when Celestin came in in the morning, I was raving in delirium.

Here I must leave myself, and relate in the next chapter what I afterwards heard of my state, and of the occurrences which happened that day.

CHAPTER XXI.

MISGIVINGS.

LADY HORATIA sent for the nearest doctor, who said that I had caught scarlet fever. Just as the whole party was thrown into the utmost consternation at this intelligence, Mrs. Mordaunt, accompanied by Norah Chandos, drove up to the door. They had intended to have come up the day before to the house Mr. Mordaunt had taken in the Regent's Park. They found Lady

Horatia in the greatest state of consternation, being particularly afraid of infection; and of course she was preparing to leave the house, and take her darling child away to the country with all possible speed. The carriage was ordered, and as soon as the servants had packed up, they were to follow.

Mrs. Mordaunt promised she would remain and take charge of me; and Norah, who had had the same fever only the year before, declared she would also stay with her, to help to nurse me, for the doctor was afraid I should be in some danger for many days. Norah attended on me with the utmost devotion, and endeavoured, by every possible means, to keep Mrs. Mordaunt away from my room, for she knew that she

dreaded so much the infection that it was all the more courageous of her to remain in the house at all.

About a week after I was taken ill, I awoke to a kind of dim consciousness, and at times I began to feel the soothing effect of Norah's gentle presence. She had obtained the most extraordinary influence over me; and some days, when I had been totally unmanageable by any of the nurses or doctors, the sound of her voice, or her light mesmeric touch, had apparently tranquillized me.

At last I became fully conscious of her presence, and asked her, as if awaking from a most agonizing nightmare or dream, where I was? I saw a delightful look of relief on her beautiful face; but she motioned to me

to be silent, and would not even answer my question, but ordered me to shut my eyes and go to sleep, and that she would tell me everything when I woke.

I must have obeyed her orders without knowing that I slept, for I remember that the sun was shining brightly into the room when I was awake; and then, what appeared to me the next moment, all was dark except the dim flicker of a shaded night-light. I looked anxiously round, and then discovered the figure of Norah asleep on a chair opposite my bed. But I had no recollection as yet of anything that had occurred before my illness.

She looked so lovely in her graceful attitude of perfect repose that I would not speak, for I felt as if it was some beautiful,

happy-making vision that might fade away if disturbed by sound or touch. So I lay perfectly still, with a soothing and delicious consciousness of returning life—life without anxiety or care; and soon my imagination travelled back to early youth and the delightful walks with my dear father through the orange groves of Sorrento. I heard the soft, lulling sound of the blue sea undulating along the rocky shore; I remembered even words he had said to me in these walks. Then I seemed transported to his old home, and fancied I saw his more glorified form leading me through the walks of the old Priory garden, and pointing out to my enchanted gaze the ancient oaks and distant tower of the village church.

I saw some of the old villagers, who had

loved him so well, come and look joyfully on his bright face, which seemed to be illuminated with a new kind of magically harmonious light, such as I had never before seen. I felt sure that it was his glorified spirit form, and yet that I too had attained a kind of spiritual state, and should never be separated from him again.

All this I saw and felt more vividly than I ever did when in the real places where I fancied myself; yet I never lost sight of Norah—she seemed to form a part of it, or rather it was as if her lovely presence produced all the enchanting feelings and impressions of reality which surrounded me.

During my long life there is no fact of which I have obtained a stronger conviction than of the mesmeric power of goodness. I

had a strong perception of Norah's wonderful charm in our first interview, but it was long years afterwards that I knew the real cause of this harmony and peacefully happy feeling the sight and even the thought of her had produced. No bad, proud, or passionate feeling could be associated in my mind with the idea of her, and I am certain that her loving prayers and innocent presence had the power, in those hours of my returning life, to keep from my recollection and consciousness all the period of my life when I was actuated by selfish and passionately perverse feeling.

During the waking hours of that night, my mind seemed fed by the recollection of those parts of my life only which had been passed in comparatively happy innocence.

I scarcely remembered Carlo except in my earliest childhood, when he used to clamber up the rocks to pick my favourite flowers, or carried me across the mountain torrents.

The wild selfish love which he had awakened in my heart in later days, when also he himself had become less good after my father's death, had no place in my visions that night, nor even the later tumultuous passion which Sir Alfred had awakened.

Every feeling that had been caused by disappointment or reckless perversity seemed completely swept from my memory. I remained in this blissful state of dreamy happiness till the day dawned, and then Norah awoke.

I saw her eyes open and look at me with a kind of thankful expression, as if a load of

care had been taken from her mind, and kneeling down by my side she took both my hands in hers and placed them on her forehead. I saw and felt that she was returning thanks to God for my recovery. I endeavoured to join in her prayers, and tried to remember those I used to repeat in my childhood.

Norah afterwards told me that she was convinced that the fever had been made much worse by some exciting or painful impressions lately produced on my mind, and therefore she would not allow me to talk or ask her about anything that had happened since I came to London.

She asked me about my mother, and, when disposed to talk, she would make me describe my home at Sorrento, and my father. Many

days passed before she would allow me to speak of Lady Horatia, or answer my questions as to where I was, or how long I had been unconscious. Thus under her judicious management I gained bodily strength before my mind was allowed to dwell on exciting or painful thoughts.

But the awakening to evil, to mingled regrets and remorse, could not be for ever staved away ; but the difference was that the thought of all that was exciting was now mingled with remorse. With the recollection of Carlo in our later years came the conviction that I had neglected to abide by my father's opinion of him. I had wilfully disregarded his caution, and would not listen to his words of blame. I saw how guilty I had been when I shut myself up

after my father's death, and could not be induced to comfort my mother, and shrank from all exertion till Carlo came.

Then I felt there was an interval of comparative innocence during my convent life, and, above all, in those blissful days when, under my hallowed father's recollection, I lived at Langdale Priory. This was the brightest spot in my life, and when I lost it, and allowed myself to be absorbed in ambitious dreams, all the bad passions of my nature had been called forth ; I ceased to pray, I ceased to feel that I was under God's protection, and I gave myself up to the excitement of a new passion, which had made me faithless even to the recollection of a man to whom I had willingly plighted my faith.

I felt conscious that I still loved Sir Al-

fred, but my affection for him was changed into an anxious wish and prayer that the inherent good qualities of his mind and heart might be called forth. I now saw and felt that he was wasting his life in folly and vice. I seemed to be constantly praying for him, but was quite surprised to find how little anxiety I felt to see him again. I seemed to dread lest I should again fall into the kind of intoxicating adoration his fascination had caused, until I became more fitted to help or guide him into a better path of life.

CHAPTER XXII.

NORAH'S REVELATION.

SOME days after I had recovered my consciousness, and, thanks to Norah's care, still retained the feeling of peace with which I had awakened to new life, Mrs. Mordaunt came into the room and said that her nephew, Sir Alfred Rivers, was in the drawing-room. She gave this information to Norah in the most unconcerned manner, from probably knowing nothing of either her nephew's or of my peculiar feelings, for she

had only once seen us together, and it was not likely that Lady Horatia would have expressed any of her fears on my account to Mrs. Mordaunt.

Besides this, the world had for some weeks past proclaimed that I was engaged to the Marquis of Lorrington. I found afterwards that the little Marquis had called incessantly, and had often begged to be allowed to see me, in spite of the infection.

“Sir Alfred is in waiting below,” said Mrs. Mordaunt, speaking to Norah, as if she wished that Norah would go down to see him; and, to my utter surprise, I saw her beautiful face covered with most conscious blushes, and her hand trembled so much that she nearly let a cup of soup fall that

she was bringing across the room to me.

“Then you know him,” I said ; and I shall never forget the look of hope, mingled with anxiety and joy, with which she regarded me, nor the thrilling tone of her “oh! yes.”

I must have turned pale, for she ran up to me and inquired with anxiety what I felt.

“Nothing,” I said ; “really I am quite well ; do go down and see him.”

“Does he know I am here, and does he wish to see me ?” said Norah, in a trembling voice.

“I did not tell him,” said Mrs. Mordaunt. “I don’t know whether he knew it or not. He came to ask how Miss Vivian was going on, and I thought you might like to see him, as I knew you often met last year.”

“But unless he wishes to see me I would rather not go down.”

“Well, I’ll go and ask him,” said dear, matter-of-fact, and most unconscious Mrs. Mordaunt.

“How very strange that he should never have talked of you !” I said.

“I suppose he did not know we had met,” she said. And there was a slight and most new sadness in her voice, which perplexed me.

“Oh ! do go down and see him,” I implored, for I longed to have the strange mystery of Norah’s evident agitation cleared up. When she saw that I really wished it, she went down with Mrs. Mordaunt.

Where could she have known him ? And why had he never spoken about her ? And

why did Lady Horatia never say anything about her to me? The more I thought and asked these questions, the more perplexing it all seemed, and my agitation increased as the minutes, which seemed hours, passed before she returned.

Norah must in some way have divined my feeling, for the clock had only moved ten minutes when I heard her light step hurrying upstairs. She ran towards me, and throwing her arms round my neck, buried her face; but I had caught a sad look on it before she nestled her head on my shoulder.

"You care for him!" I whispered, as I kissed her dear little ear.

"Do you?" she inquired, as she started up, and looked, with a searching, tender

gaze, into my eyes. I did not answer for a few moments, during which the experience of a whole life seemed to be centred, and then I said,

“You must have known him before I did, therefore you must answer my question first.”

“He no longer cares for me, if he ever did,” said Norah, while the tears ran down her cheeks, but by some marvellous power her countenance still retained its cheerfulness, mingled with resignation, which was most touching to behold.

“He does—he must! Do go down again and see him. I felt sure there was something which prevented, and oh! what a fool I was not to attend to Lady Horatia’s—to so many warnings!”

“Why, they did not tell you about me, surely?”

“No, most unfortunately they did not. They only said that I was like a moth hovering about a light which would consume me.”

“Then they had a bad opinion of him?” she inquired, with a sudden expression of intense pain.

“I suppose so ; but under your influence it would be quite different. I am not good enough to help—to lead anyone right. But is he really gone—gone without any explanation?”

“I suppose so. Yes, I heard the street-door shut as I came into this room, and I am sure he would not remain.”

I then gradually drew from her an

avowal of all that had passed. She had first met him two years before, at an aunt's country-house, where they became very intimate; and she had first been drawn to love him principally from feeling that she had some strange influence over him.

He had been wild at college, although he had taken a high degree, and some of his most intimate friends were of a dangerously profligate kind. He had been early left an orphan, and had no near relations except Mr. Mordaunt, who was not calculated to have any strong influence over him. The great-aunt with whom Norah was staying, being a very unworldly and straightforward character, would allow no engagement to be entered into, "as Norah was only sixteen," but added, that if both were in the

same mind after two years, they were to be allowed to marry ; and this plan was also approved of by Norah's father as well as herself.

In the meantime, it was agreed that nothing should be said about it ; so the attachment was kept secret from everyone, except two or three very intimate friends, and among them was Lady Horatia, who took the greatest interest in Norah, as well as in the handsome youth. She was wise enough to discover that Norah was exactly the person possessing the marvellous firmness, tact, and self-control suited to influence Sir Alfred ; and she said at the time that, if Norah had been her daughter, she would have consented at once to their marriage.

It seemed that she was right as far as Sir

Alfred was concerned, for, in consequence of his disappointment, he fell more fatally under the influence of his false friends, and his extraordinary success in the fastidious London society of that day helped to obliterate the good which his attachment to Norah had called forth.

Lady Horatia had watched him with intense anxiety, and therefore saw with great pain how strongly he had been struck by me. But at first she hoped it was more from the vanity of exciting the admiration of "the new beauty," as she called me, than from any deeper feeling. But what she dreaded most was my voice. Norah was not accomplished; she did not sing, and music was Sir Alfred's specialty. The report of our flirtation had never reached

Norah's ears, for she told me, if it had, she would have felt sure that he would be completely fascinated by my peculiarly Italian style of singing.

“Oh ! if Lady Horatia had but told me that first night at the Duke of D——'s,” thought I, “that he had been attached to Norah, what years of pain might have been avoided !”

But Lady Horatia, though a quick reader of character, had no deep knowledge of human nature, and, moreover, was inclined to think less well of it than it deserves. She was not religious-minded enough to know the value of real Christian training, and gave credit to it for less influence than it really possesses. Besides, she saw plainly that I was not good, and, therefore, natu-

rally judged that my spirit of contradiction and jealousy would be awakened to acts still more contrary to her wishes, if I thought I could enjoy the additional triumph of supplanting another girl in his affections. She told me afterwards she had been on the point of not cautioning me at all for this very reason about him, and regretted much that she had done so, because she said that it had the reverse effect from that she intended. Moreover, through it all she did not know my deep affection for Norah. And now, to think I had been the means of destroying the happiness of my friend—of the most perfect nature I had ever met with—of the being who called forth all my best and highest feelings !

The fact is, she was the most thoroughly

good person I had ever seen ; but, strange to say, goodness is not generally deemed attractive, and yet Norah's attraction was caused by it ; and I maintain that real goodness is attractive, nor will it allow people to be dull. The énergy it imparts to enable one to bear pain, to be cheerful in the midst of adversity, to love all those around us, and try to amuse or help them, is of itself enlivening and beautiful—vivifyingly beautiful ; and is farther removed from anything approaching to dulness than any other condition of being. There was a sparkling, sprightly cheerfulness about her, caused by an ever-abiding expectation of eternal happiness, which was irresistibly cheering.

Even I, who was anything but good when I first saw her, felt that her great charm

was that she was immeasurably superior to me in goodness, and that there lay the secret of her influence. She was Scripturally amiable—I mean that she habitually acted and thought on “whatsoever things were lovely,” and that she was a living embodiment of the real charity, or ἀγάπη, which “suffers long and is kind,” and “thinks no ill.” You who have known something of my despair, or believing nothing, fancy you dislike these words—yes, however wicked you may feel inclined to be, you would feel in your inmost heart the positive charm of a character formed on that model—you could not help it. No so-called fast young lady or gentleman, however clever or lovely they may be, could instil the sort of exhilarating cheerfulness Norah always con-

trived to produce. She would never let you be dull—she would make you feel hope in the future, as well as present enlivenment.

Still, I hear some readers say, virtue is decidedly dull. Wait till you are on your death-bed (but perhaps you fancy that hour will never come!), and see then what portion of your past life appears to you most dull or devoid of real happiness; and you will see that the only bright, and lively, and shining spots are those in which you did your best to follow up the precepts of this much-despised goodness.

In my sixty-sixth year I went to a ball, and all the so-called dandies and fine young men declared that I was the brightest person there. Several told some friends of

mine that it made them happy to look at my sprightly and bright countenance; and in the matter of feeling really gay and full of youthful enjoyment, I was in mind the youngest of them all. The endeavour to do right had certainly not made me look dull. But I see every day more and more that virtue is despised, and Revelation ignored. I did not, however, attain the peace I now enjoy till I had suffered many severe trials; and at that time—the period of my visit to Lady Horatia—I was still in a far worse state than I had any idea of at the time.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FAILURE.

OUR conversation on that eventful day was not half ended—I mean that I longed to ask Norah a great deal more about her engagement, or rather her affection, for Sir Alfred, when we were startled by the arrival of a telegram, which Mrs. Mordaunt brought up to my room for Norah. It was dated from Chandos Mount, and contained these words :

“Come home immediately, your father is dangerously ill.”

Poor Norah, I well knew the deep and all-absorbing affection she had for her father, and could read the anxious misery her quivering lips and tearless eyes expressed as she hastily bade me good-bye. She was too eager to be off, and too anxious to allow herself the relief of tears. Her whole being was in a state of suspense—prayerful suspense, I saw plainly. She promised to let me hear of his state, and, with marvellously unselfish thought, she suggested to Mrs. Mordaunt to take me to the house Mr. Mordaunt had engaged, as the change might be of use, now that I was fast recovering my strength.

So I was removed to the Regent's Park,

and the day after our arrival there Sir Alfred Rivers called, and hearing that Mrs. Mordaunt was out, begged to be allowed to see me. When I heard he was downstairs, I determined to carry out the resolution I had made during the conversation with Norah. I would give him up—yes, most certainly I would—and endeavour to re-awaken his love for that beautiful and most perfect girl. So I went downstairs, half triumphing in the feeling of unselfishness which prompted me, and half regretful at the greatness of the sacrifice—for I loved him still! But I was still too prone to evil. I had no strength to pursue the narrow and thorny path which led to peaceful and eternal happiness.

The fascination of his words, his looks,

counteracted the blessed influence that Norah had exercised over me, and before many minutes had passed in his presence, I found myself re-engaged to him ! Norah's love, her devotion to me during my long illness—all was forgotten. I seemed to live only for the present, in my wild adoration for Sir Alfred. Every other thought and recollection was swept away. I felt only a kind of joyful exultation in being thus bound, and in giving up all my resolutions of self-sacrifice.

The next few days and sleepless nights were passed in this kind of unnatural and fatal excitement, and then came a strange and sudden reverse. I afterwards learnt that something of the same kind of reckless forgetfulness of his former love, and best

and highest intentions, had possessed Sir Alfred, but the effect with him was in some respects more fatal.

The season was now over ; he had more unoccupied time, and he played so deeply every night and lost such large sums—unknown to me—that total ruin ensued. Part of his property was strictly entailed, but he had exhausted all resources, so that four days after our engagement he was compelled suddenly to leave England.

That very morning I had expected him to come earlier than usual, for we had arranged to spend the day at Richmond. I had my bonnet on, the carriage was at the door, and I was eagerly awaiting his arrival, when Mr. Mordaunt came into the drawing-room with a thunder-cloud on his face, and

handed me a note in Sir Alfred's well-known writing, while he broke forth into a torrent of invective against his nephew. This violent abuse betrayed to me, even before I was able to read the note, that he had fully expected this. He declared that he was certain his wife was wrong when she mentioned that his love for me would reform him.

"I knew he ought to have kept his engagement," he continued, "to that poor Norah. It is owing to his self-reproach at having forsaken her that he has risked all his remaining fortune. There, Miss Vivian, you may thank yourself for this boy's ruin and your own loss; for Lady Horatia told us that the Marquis of Lorrington wished to marry you."

I had some difficulty in reading the blot-

ted lines of this unfortunate note, and the angry clamour Mr. Mordaunt kept up did not assist my efforts to decipher it.

I was so stunned by the unexpected blow that I could only take in that he was gone, obliged to fly from his numerous creditors; but why, oh! why could he not have permitted me to accompany him in his flight! This was the wild and sinful thought that came uppermost. "He could not love me with the all-absorbing devotion I felt for him—impossible!" I thought.

I was hastening from the room, with the perverse intention of shutting myself up in despair, of locking the door of my own room as I had done in both the fits of utter wretchedness into which I had before fallen, when the humiliating thought flashed into

my mind that I had no home, that I was only a visitor in Mr. Mordaunt's house, and that he was (as I afterwards saw) justly annoyed with me for helping largely to ruin his nephew.

I must leave his house at once ; and where was I to go ? The perplexity of my strange situation seemed to paralyse all my faculties, and I sank down into a chair with a feeling of utter helplessness.

"I must go to my mother ; I have no home in England," I sobbed.

"No, no, not yet ; you are not fit to travel such a long distance ; besides, I have just heard that Miss Stanway is expected in England, if she has not yet arrived, and I know she wants to see you. In fact, I believe she hastened home on purpose, from

some reports she had heard about you."

Aunt Jane! how could I bear to see her clear searching eyes, to be looked through and through in the perverse state of mind in which I had lived for many months.

"Oh, I cannot see her!" I exclaimed, as I covered my face with my hands, as if to hide it from every eye, and, above all, from hers.

"Not see her? What a silly girl! Why, she is the person of all others to advise you best; why, you used to love Aunt Jane better than you did any of us. And, by Jove! I verily believe that she is at the door," he added, as he looked out at the window. "Yes, there's the same old brown bonnet and shawl!"

Oh! what a vision of lost peace and hap-

piness did the recollection of this old brown bonnet and shawl produce.

The associations called up by it already seemed to give me some degree of peace. Mr. Mordaunt had rushed downstairs, and in a few moments I felt that Aunt Jane's arms were round my neck, although I still continued to cover my face with my hands.

She did not attempt to draw them away, nor did she speak, but she softly kissed my forehead, and stroked my head, with that mesmeric touch of peace which some few favoured mortals have the wondrous power to give.

But pride and perversity had a sharp battle in my breast before I withdrew my hands and ventured to look up at Aunt Jane's anxious face.

It had a more anxious and severe expression than I thought it was capable of wearing; but after a few moments her countenance somewhat cleared, and she said,

“Poor child! she must still have much to suffer!—there will be a long battle; but I will not desert you again—you shall remain with me now till you can become happy. I will take her away, Mr. Mordaunt—she shall go with me to Roland Grange; but that fatal engagement she has made with Sir Alfred must be quite given up.”

“*He* seems to have given it up,” I exclaimed, with a kind of savage bitterness which made Aunt Jane start. “Look, look at his letter. He only expresses regret—there, read his letter—he says nothing of

hope—he evidently does not look forward—does not express any wish ever to see me again.”

“So much the better,” said Aunt Jane, in a more severe tone than I thought she could ever assume. “You fully deserve this, for I learn that you actually accepted him after you knew of his former engagement to your best and kindest friend.”

After reading the letter I had given her, with the same determined and severe look, she placed ink and paper before me, and, putting a pen into my trembling hand, said, in a voice of strange authority,

“Write, write, and tell him that his fancied engagement to you was quite a mistake—that you entirely release him, in case he might possibly have any intention of

regarding it as serious. In fact, by his letter, he does not seem to do so. It was a passing fancy, and he resolved to have the triumph of captivating a girl who had refused the greatest *parti* of the day."

I wrote the words she dictated, though my anger was fearfully excited. I wrote it through with burning, tearless eyes. The bell was rung, and the letter was despatched to the post. Then I felt as if I had received a sudden blow, which deprived me of reason; the room seemed to be turning round. Aunt Jane's face, the blotting-book, all swam in a confused jumble before my eyes, and I became quite insensible.

CHAPTER XXIV.

STUPOR AND STRANGE RECOVERY.

I HAVE a very dim recollection of anything that happened during the next two months. Aunt Jane says that I was in a kind of stupor, from which she was afraid to arouse me. After the dangerous illness, which would certainly have proved fatal had not Norah watched over me day and night with the most extraordinary care and skill, and then the consciousness of my most culpable and ungrateful engagement to her

affianced lover, which Aunt Jane had re-awakened in my mind,—all this seemed to have paralysed my faculties. She took me down to an old half-uninhabited, and scarcely half-furnished house belonging to her niece, surrounded with fine oak woods, called Roland Grange, so called from having been formerly the dower-house of the ancient family of De Roland; but one of the gambling earls half ruined the originally vast estates, and many broad acres were sold, although the family still possessed the fine park and woods of the old Castle Hall, about three miles from the Grange, which belonged now to Cunigunda, Countess Rossi, the sole representative of the time-honoured family, which was said to have sprung from the celebrated Orlando sung by Ariosto

and other poets ; or Roland, the hero of old English romances. But I took, at the time I write of, no impression of, nor felt any interest about the place.

I had no impressions of anything. I could neither read nor think, nor scarcely talk. The doctor whom Aunt Jane consulted gave her very little hopes of my recovery, but she told me afterwards that she had felt convinced that, if I could become stronger, my mental disease, or rather stupor, would be removed. She used to wheel me in a little chair out among the woods, when the song of birds sometimes appeared to have a pleasant effect, and made me (as she said) look less miserable ; but I could not endure the sound of music, and I shrunk away from the sight of a pianoforte with a

shudder, and could not be prevailed on to open or listen to it. She also took me to visit some of the poor cottagers; and the first circumstance I remember was a visit to an old blind woman, who expressed a wish to pass her hand over my face, when, as I afterwards heard, Aunt Jane had been describing it to her.

The peculiar tone of the old woman's voice struck my ears, and seemed to waken me up, as if from a long sleep filled with painful dreams. I looked round with surprise on the little homely room, and through its open latticed window on the garden, where the sweet-smelling flowers and beehives, and the fine oak and beech-trees, reminded me pleasantly of some of my dear father's cottages at the Priory.

There was a spinning-wheel near the old woman, and after passing her hand over my face, she began to spin with an abstracted and thoughtful look.

“Where am I, and who is this?” I inquired, as I looked round to Aunt Jane, and then felt as if I was astonished also even to see her.

She then looked both pleased and surprised, but, without answering my question, inquired of the old dame what she thought of my face.

“I canna tell, for it ’minds me so strong of my own children—I mean my own young ladies at the Castle Hall—that I seem to live over again the years long, long gone by. There was my Lady Jane Roland, the sweetest babe that ever gladdened a

mother's heart ; and she was good, too—far too good for——But what am I saying ? Shame on me to breathe a word against any of the old family !”

Then she stopped suddenly, and her compressed lips seemed to show that she was afraid of saying anything more.

“ But I have heard,” said Aunt Jane, “ that Lady Jane's brother was anything but good—indeed, very wicked—that there were two kinds in every generation since they came over at the Norman Conquest ; and I am sure all the family pictures I have seen at the Castle Hall tell the same story. I never saw such a contrast as there was between old Lord de Roland and his younger brother, and that very Lady Jane you reared was his sister.”

“Alack-a-day! and so there was; and as you know so much about the family, I cannot do no harm, and——”

“And I like to hear about them, and so will this young lady, whose face reminds you of them, and who is distantly related to them; for Lady Jane’s daughter married, as you well know, a foreign Count, who was a relative of her mother’s family.”

I believe it was the old woman’s mention of Lady Jane Roland that effectually woke up my attention, and roused my dormant senses, and I seemed now to comprehend for the first time that we were staying at Roland Grange, which must be near Castle Hall, the fine old family residence of the Rolands, now belonging to the fatally fascinating Cunigunda.

I then eagerly inquired whether they were staying at the Castle, and was told that they had not yet arrived, but were expected in a few days, and that one of the wings of the Castle had been fitted up for their reception.

Aunt Jane was overjoyed to see that I took some interest in the place, and said she would drive me over there to-morrow, that we might see all the pictures, books, and curiosities it contained before the family arrived.

“And what do you think about the ghost?” inquired Aunt Jane of the blind woman. Her countenance altered, and she suddenly stopped her spinning-wheel. After a few moments, she said, in a somewhat solemn tone,

“Far be it from me to tell or to doubt. I have seen and I have heard. And now they say the present lady is not—— But maybe this beautiful young lady knows better what her relative is like.”

“Not one of the good race, I am certain,” said I, with quick decision.

“Ah! I see you don’t like her; but did you know the rightful lady? I mean the Lady Dorina, the one I heard was the very picture of my Lady Jane—she who was lost the night before she was to have married this very same Count.”

“No; but I have heard the poor lost bride was the most heavenly creature that ever lived, as well as the most lovely, and I have seen a likeness of her.”

“Oh! tell me,” inquired the old dame;

“had she dark-blue eyes, with long, long lashes, and a mouth that seemed formed only to utter blessings, and light golden hair, with long, waving curls, that flowed as if they were going to twine round one’s finger in a loving embrace?”

“Yes, the picture showed all this.”

“And a voice that made one feel in heaven to hear it; and a light fairy figure, and step so cheering like, that I used to fancy the flowers bloomed sweeter under her beautiful feet.”

The old woman continued for some time to expatiate on the loveliness of her darling, also to describe her daughter, who married Count Hohenstein, and went away to foreign parts, taking as her maid one of old Dame Jestico’s own children.

This young girl had afterwards married Count Hohenstein's groom, and her children were brought up with those of her mistress at the Castle of Hohenstein. Thus a communication had always been kept up, and the old dame of course knew all the particulars of the mysterious disappearance of the beautiful bride on the eve of her wedding-day. Her (poor Dorina's) favourite attendant, who was old Dame Jestico's grand-daughter, had disappeared a few days afterwards, and was said to have also perished in the cave, in a vain endeavour to find a clue to her mistress, or at least discover her body in the labyrinths of those wonderful caverns.

Although none of the neighbours, or the poor people round the old Castle of the

Rolands, had ever seen its beautiful heiress, Dorina, yet their grief at hearing of her tragic end had been very great. And their regret was increased when, in the following year, the Count, her father, died, and his niece, Cunigunda, who had just married the widowed bridegroom, Count Rossi, became the next heir to the Castle and estates of the ancient family of Roland.

It was well known that she was, in every respect except beauty, the very reverse of her cousin Dorina, and vague rumours were sometimes heard that her jealousy and malice had caused the bride's miserable end. She had planned the ball which was given in the wonderful caves near the Castle, which were said to extend as far as Adlesberg, under the Styrian mountains, where the

bride had disappeared, accompanied, it was said, by an English gentleman.

For some time it was suspected by those who were not intimately acquainted with Dorina, that she had eloped with him, until, many months afterwards, it was discovered that he had fallen down into one of the hidden caverns, and was picked up in a state of insensibility by some robber, whose daughter concealed him in their secret dens, until he was sufficiently recovered to travel. And then they only allowed him to depart after he had taken a solemn vow never to disclose their abode, nor to communicate even his existence to the Hohenstein family for some time afterwards. When this gentleman, Mr., now Sir Edward, arrived in England, and appeared among his friends,

who had given him up as lost in the caverns, his extraordinary escape gave some hopes to the neighbours and tenants of Castle Hall that Dorina might also have been saved.

Old Dame Jestico said that she never gave up the hope of Dorina, and her own great-grandchild, until she heard that Count Rossi had married the Lady Cunigunda ; for she had heard often from her granddaughter that he was most deeply in love with his betrothed—in fact, that he worshipped the very ground on which she trod, and had always been the most devoted lover ; and it was the remark of everyone that they were made for each other. But Cunigunda was always jealous, and though she seemed to be very fond of her cousin, Ulrica said she was certain that she hated the beautiful bride.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ROLAND FAMILY.

THE next day we drove to Castle Hall, and I was enchanted with the beauty of the Elizabethan house, and its situation among the fine woods at the bottom of a steep hill, which was surmounted by the towers and ruins of the ancient castle. The most perfect and highest of these towers was supposed to be Roman, and, as in many other English castles, is therefore called Cæsar's. It is built at the edge of a high

perpendicular rock, and its lofty battlements, and a beautiful oriel window in its upper story, project over the river, which rushes round its base, and then forms a lake at the bottom of the terraced gardens far below.

The comparatively modern house was partly built in Henry VII.'s time, had received several additions in succeeding centuries, and was placed half way down the rocky height ; but some of the old Castle buildings extended down the least precipitous side of it, and joined the present dwelling. One of these had been the ancient Castle chapel, afterwards turned into a banqueting room by a certain Earl Hugh, who was called the black devil of ——, and had died of apoplexy at the first banquet he gave there.

Above this, a range of building, nearly entire, wound round the side of the height, and joined the whole to Cæsar's tower.

We drove up to the entrance of the Hall, and the grand old porch door was opened by Aunt Jane's old friend, Mrs. Lacy, the housekeeper, who received us with stately curtseys and dignified smiles of welcome. She was nearly eighty, and had lived in the family ever since she was born, being the foster-sister of one of the Earls of Roland. We entered a vast hall, which was said to be the most modern part of the whole, erected in James the First's reign. The lofty ceiling was beautifully carved, and ornamented with pendent bosses and coloured shields, showing the numerous quarterings of the Rolands. The walls were all

covered with armour, shields, helmets, and banners, won in the Crusades and other wars.

Mrs. Lacy then took us into a long suite of rooms, filled with old pictures and tapestry, and all kinds of picturesque cabinets and old furniture. Then we went up the grand old oak staircase to a long gallery, which extended for more than a hundred feet along the western side of the quadrangle, and from some of its deep bay windows we had a good view of the park—a real English park, which reminded me of my own dear Priory woods; but the scenery was finer here, from the hills being higher, and the dells more rocky and steep.

Then we went to the library and the blue drawing-room, which were on a still higher

level, and joined the hall with some of the old castle buildings.

A picture of Vandyck over the carved chimney-piece in the blue room riveted my attention more than anything I had seen, for I recognized at once its striking likeness to the portrait I had seen of the Countess Dorina.

This was the beautiful Lady Jane Roland which the blind woman had so well described, and I found that Mrs. Lacy also remembered her, and had the same admiration for the lovely Countess.

While I was looking at the picture I heard Aunt Jane ask Mrs. Lacy what door that was at the opposite end of the room, and whether any use was ever made of the old buildings beyond. As I looked in the di-

rection Aunt Jane pointed, I found that Mrs. Lacy's countenance changed, and a look of embarrassment and perplexity overspread her fair old face. After a little pause, she said,

"No, ma'am, no use was ever made of those rooms in my time, nor my mother's either, and she was housekeeper for sixty-six years, before I succeeded her."

"Is it because they are said to be haunted?" inquired Aunt Jane.

"Perhaps so; but the floors of many of them are gone, and the windows have no glass; and the dead-room, which looks into the upper courtyard, has not been used since the good Earl Lawrence was laid out in state then, when I was quite a child, and the roof was said to be unsafe."

“And the Chapel or Banqueting Hall—why is that never shown? It must be a splendid room, from the appearance of its windows. I remember looking down upon it when I once mounted to the top of Cæsar’s tower.”

“That’s not safe either, I have heard, ma’am.”

“And the ghost of the wicked Earl Hugh is said to haunt it, and now I hear that a lady appears, too, sometimes. Is that supposed to be the ghost of this lovely creature?” inquired Aunt Jane, as she pointed to the portrait of Lady Jane.

“No, ma’am,” said Mrs. Lacy, with a serious and somewhat proud look; “she was far too good to become a ghost. It is poor Lady Alice who was not quite—but, ma’am,

you must excuse me, for I never like to talk of any but the real, downright good ones of our family."

"And Lady Alice has been seen lately, has she not?"

"Have you heard so, ma'am?" she said, with a look of alarm.

"Yes; the village gossips say that she has been seen often during this last year, and that strange lights appear up in the ruined windows of the old castle on dark nights—even in the oriel that projects over the torrent, and to which there is no staircase. So it must be a ghost that lights it up then," said Aunt Jane, with a smile.

"Do they say so, indeed, ma'am? Well, I do wish that—— However, the Lord's will be done; it is not for me to wish or think——"

“Do you regret that the family—that the Count and Countess Rossi are coming here?”

“I certainly ought not,” said the old dame, decidedly, and as if she was determined not to say anything more ; and there was something in the way she seemed to check the utterance of her thoughts that reminded us both of the blind woman’s words when speaking of the family.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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